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The Epigraphic Character: Fiction and Metafiction in the Twentieth-Century Novel

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The Epigraphic Character: Fiction and Metafiction in the Twentieth-Century Novel

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Abstract

The Epigraphic Character: Fiction and Metafiction in the Twentieth-Century Novel

By Kerry Higgins Wendt

This dissertation identifies the epigraphic character – a character who overtly voices ideas about fiction, writing, or literature. Epigraphic novels are not metafictions, but lie somewhere between conventional fiction and metafiction. Unlike metafictions, epigraphic novels are not primarily interested in the relationship between fiction and reality, but are concerned with the relationships among literature, life, aesthetics, and literary theory. When the epigraphic statement is compared with other aspects of the novel, a dialectical relationship is initiated. Theory and practice synthesize into a third entity: what the book, as a whole, says. Reader strive to reconstruct and understand the author's deeper meaning, the meaning that is not simply the epigraphic statement or the story but results from the two in dialogue.

I have analyzed the epigraphic character along biographical, dialogical, rhetorical, and narratological lines in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man*, Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair.* The biographical approach includes consideration of what Joyce did during the years he wrote *Portrait*, what Flann O'Brien read, Greene's interest in religion, and information culled from manuscript drafts and letters. I have also addressed the epigraphic character along literary historical lines to show how it developed and evolved, and have closely analyzed the epigraphic passages and their placement in the novel. Readings of fictional presentations of writers writing provide additional context for understanding the epigraphic passages. The dissertation classifies epigraphic novels as comic – usually satirical – and noncomic, the most prevalent themes of which are life, sex, passion, and God.

Although the epigraphic character is inherently metafictional, it is also inherently fictional: it relies on the story and builds a dynamic by putting story, discourse, and rhetorical elements into dialogue. Postmodern works often flatten out; their stories fall through or they evade meaning. They cannot support the epigraphic dynamic. The epigraphic novel uses metafictional means to talk about how stories work; metafiction uses stories to talk about how fiction works. Fiction and metafiction are a continuum, and the epigraphic character is a metafictional element that exists as a central part of otherwise conventional fiction.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"You know, it's a funny thing about writers. Most people don't stop to think of books being written by people much like themselves. They think that writers are all dead long ago – they don't expect to meet them in the street or out shopping."

–Cornelia Funke, *Inkheart*

If fiction is supposed to present believable versions of reality, why are so many fictional characters authors? Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*, John Irving's *The World According to Garp* and *A Widow for One Year*, Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Stephen King's *Misery*, and countless other novels all center on writer-protagonists. The author-as-character pervades contemporary popular fiction. Although authors have become familiar characters to today's readers, few readers may be personally acquainted with an author in real life. The convention does not reflect the experience of the majority of readers; it is not realistic, though many of the novels that employ it are firmly entrenched in realism. In addition to the overrepresentation of authors in fiction, many other novels center on literary theorists, a group whose number is even more circumscribed. Despite the fact that few people spend more than a few years of their lives in the academy – and despite the fact that the academy seems, on the surface, to offer little opportunity for plot-advancement – the academy is enjoying an unprecedented popularity as a setting for novels, among them James Hynes's *The Lecturer's Tale*, Richard Russo's *Straight Man*, Jane Smiley's *Moo*, and David Lodge's

academic trilogy, *Changing Places*, *Small World*, and *Nice Work*. What ends might these conventions serve? What are their roots? Why are author-characters so common, despite the rarity of real-life authors? And why do theorist-characters exist at all?

The two characters are examples of the same literary figure – the *epigraphic character*. Epigraphic characters overtly voice ideas about fiction, writing, or literature; what they say always speaks to the novel in which they appear, sometimes obliquely and sometimes more or less directly. Its roots lie in modernist concerns with the ontological status of literature. The epigraphic character is, from a historical-materialist point of view, a natural outgrowth of the development of the novel from a quasi-literary use of prose into a distinct literary genre. Mikhail Bakhtin gives us an overview of this development at the beginning of “Discourse in the Novel”:

> Before the twentieth century, problems associated with a stylistics of the novel had not been precisely formulated – such a formulation could only have resulted from a recognition of the stylistic uniqueness of novelistic (artistic-prose) discourse.
>
> For a long time treatment of the novel was limited to little more than abstract ideological examination and publicistic commentary. Concrete questions of stylistics were either not treated at all or treated in passing and in an arbitrary way: the discourse of artistic prose was either understood as being poetic in the narrow sense, and had the categories of traditional stylistics (based on the study of tropes) uncritically applied to it, or else such questions were limited to empty, evaluative terms for the characterization of language, such as “expressiveness,”

> "imagery," "force," "clarity," and so on – without providing these concepts with any stylistic significance, however vague and tentative.
>
> Toward the end of the last [the nineteenth] century, as a counterweight to this abstract ideological way of viewing things, interest began to grow in the concrete problems of artistic craftsmanship in prose, in the problems of novel and short-story technique. However, in questions of stylistics the situation did not change in the slightest; attention was concentrated almost exclusively on problems of composition (in the broad sense of the word). But, as before, the peculiarities of the stylistic life of discourse in the novel (and in the short story as well) lacked an approach that was both principled and at the same time concrete. (260)

Novels, in other words, were not often considered as a distinct art-form until the end of the nineteenth century. Victorians tended to conceive of the novel in terms of the ideology it reflected; they read and interpreted novels by and large didactically, for their meanings. The artistry of novels was generally considered similar to poetry and was judged by the same stylistic criteria; thus, it was considered far inferior to poetry artistically.

Authors are generally the first to formulate ideas about literature, and critics, lagging a few years behind, start to see literature as it has recently been presented. They codify into criticism and theory what artists have presented in art and commentary. Authors do not change literature by merely adding their own works to it – they also change how we see other literary works retrospectively. Critics and theorists take this changed understanding and apply it not only to the newer works that embody this changed understanding, but, by working it into a broader understanding of literature, they

apply it to literature as a whole. Therefore I take Bakhtin to be working, in part, from ideas about literature presented in literature by writers working just before him, writers such as Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, or even Eduard Dujardin, who drew attention to the style of novelistic prose. The idea of looking more closely at the style of a novel's prose, in other words, originated with these author's experiments with the style of a novel's prose. That Bakhtin, working in a time ripe with such ideas, turned his attention to the novel's stylistics into a revolutionary way of looking at all literature and all language, testifies to his particular genius.

Only around the turn of the century – roughly around the advent of modernism – did a consciousness of the novel as a genre distinct from poetry and from other kinds of prose, such as letters and essays, emerge with much force. According to Bakhtin, this consciousness is neither a linguistics nor a stylistics of the novel; rather, it focuses on aesthetic theories about how novels are composed. Modernists were interested in how novels are built, both in terms of the relations and workings of the internal parts of novels and in terms of how authors assemble those parts. At the time Bakhtin wrote "Discourse in the Novel," there was, according to him, as yet still no stylistics of the novel, leaving the modernists to wrestle with the ontological status of the novel, to focus on novelistic composition, and to begin to experiment with a stylistics of the novel. Bakhtin writes to further a linguistics of the novel, a study of how novels employ language on a smaller scale. The modernists, as Bakhtin shows us, were working in a time that conceived of the novel as constructed by an author out of various larger-scale novelistic materials. They were becoming conscious of the large-scale inner, structural workings of the novel. This change in the conceptualization of the novel accounts, in part, for the emergence of the

epigraphic character. The novel went from being a window into reality to being a thing in itself, reified into the dimensions of its own materials. The purpose of the novel changed from being a reflection of something external to being an artistic composition.

*****

The modernists thought of the novel in much the same way as Annie Dillard thinks of the writer's work in this excerpt from *The Writing Life*:

> Here is a fairly sober version of what happens in the small room between the writer and the work itself. It is similar to what happens between a painter and the canvas.
>
> First you shape the vision of what the projected work of art will be. The vision, I stress, is no marvelous thing: it is the work's intellectual structure and aesthetic surface. It is a chip of mind, a pleasing intellectual object. It is a vision of the work, not of the world. It is a glowing thing, a blurred thing of beauty. Its structure is at once luminous and translucent; you can see the world through it. After you receive the initial charge of this imaginary object, you add to it at once several aspects, and incubate it most gingerly as it grows into itself. . . .
>
> The vision is *sub specie aeternitatis*, a set of mental relationships, a coherent series of formal possibilities. (56-57)

Annie Dillard's vision represents an unconventional view of the novel. Rather than being simply a chronological representation of events, the novel becomes a thematic construction in which the theme guides not only the events but also the structure of the writing. For instance, Joyce wrote *Ulysses* not only as a series of pseudo-epical events,

but also in episodes that mimic, in some way, the structure of *The Odyssey*. Monsters that Odysseus encounters in Homer's text become thematic and structural guides for chapters. Thus the prose of "Proteus" is difficult to wrestle with, and Stephen wrestles with the protean nature of art. The controlling aesthetic metaphor tells us how the text is constructed.

This is how many modernist works operate. Rather than depending on conventional plot and character for their compositional integrity and meaning, modernist works often rely on a controlling aesthetic vision which determines the structure and, through the structure, the sense readers make of it. Only by understanding how the controlling aesthetic vision works can we understand the work; the conventions of Victorian and Edwardian novels can no longer serve readers of modernist novels. To the extent that readers try to apply or read by such conventions, they misunderstand the work. But Victorian conventions are trenchant, and contemporary readers still find modernist works difficult. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* hangs together not because it is a novel with a plot that goes through the conventional shape, but because it is constructed along the lines of a painting. It is a palimpsest, a portrait of one person at several particular points in time, on one canvas. The parts relate to the whole more in terms of a timeless vision than in terms of a progressive narrative. What happens in the first part happens, in greater detail, with more nuance, in later parts. While the story itself is spectacular, the piece really becomes art when we see how it is constructed along the lines of a painting, the parts of which we look at and contemplate simultaneously. This is how Joyce solves the problem of time – and the problem of his interminable early draft of

Portrait, *Stephen Hero*: by constructing the book as a series of snapshots, leaving out huge chunks of time.

As the purpose of art and literature changed from showing and commenting on reality, the subject matter changed as well – in all the formerly representational arts, painting as well as literature. Because the changes happened across the arts, and because, given its visual nature, it is easier to understand painting as representational, it might be easier to understand the change by turning to a painter's understanding of the shift. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky maintains that:

> One of the first steps in the turning away from material objects into the realm of the abstract was, to use the technical term, the rejection of the third dimension. Modelling was abandoned. . . . Any attempt to free painting from this material limitation [to the canvas] together with the striving after a new form of composition must concern itself first of all with the destruction of this theory of one single surface – attempts must be made to bring the picture onto some ideal plane which shall be expressed in terms of the material plane on the canvas (44).

In painting, in other words, the shift from realism to modernism meant giving up the mimeticism of three-dimensionality. But Kandinsky was not content to limit himself to the basic materials and dimensions of painting. Canvas and color, texture and two-dimensionality, were not enough. He sought to use the flat surface of the canvas to express the metaphysical. The canvas was still a window, then; it just looked out on a different view.

Modern novelists had the same problem with subject matter. With the new idea of the novel as an artistic composition as opposed to a window on reality, they lacked a

subject. One notable subject modernist writers lit upon was just what Kandinsky arrived at as the proper subject matter in painting: the metaphysical. Another was literature itself: the metafictional. This subject was paralleled in modernist art by the artists' own implicit questioning of the ontological status of art by radically changing its purpose, and culminated with the Dadaists' notorious questioning of the very notion of art itself. Painters' recourses were fairly limited – their questioning of the ontological status of art at first had to be either implicit, in their replacing an old paradigm such as realism with a new one such as impressionism, cubism, abstract art, or an out-and-out questioning of art that completely supplanted art itself, such as Duchamp's famous display of a urinal. Only with postmodernism could the visual arts combine the aesthetic with the questioning of art, with such pieces as Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Can* paintings – undeniably aesthetically moving, in its own peculiar way, as Duchamp's urinal was not, but still seemingly devoid of meaning at its core. But because of the inherent dialogism of language, modernist writers were able to both question and represent in a single work from an early stage. Often enough, modernists' preoccupations with ideas of art found their way into the subject matter and characters of the novel as well as into the composition of the novel, which is the main reason the epigraphic character takes root during this period.

Because meditation on the craftsmanship of the novel was new, novelists looked to other arts for ways to conceptualize their own art. As Virginia Woolf has said in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,"

> the men and women who began writing novels in 1910 or thereabouts had this great difficulty to face – that there was no English novelist living from whom they

> could learn their business. Mr. Conrad is a Pole; which sets him apart, and makes him, however admirable, not very helpful. Mr. Hardy has written no novel since 1895. The most prominent and successful novelists in the year 1910 were, I suppose, Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy. Now it seems to me that to go to these men and ask them to teach you how to write a novel – how to create characters that are real – is precisely like going to a bootmaker and asking him to teach you how to make a watch. (12)

Woolf's statement that how we view character changed "on or around December 1910" (4), the date of the first post-impressionist exhibit in London, tells us that literature was already looking to the visual arts to understand itself. The change in how Woolf's inclusive "we" viewed character was prompted immediately, in Woolf's estimation, by an art exhibit, but it is reasonable to say that such an exhibit was able to change "our" perceptions of character because of larger forces at work – forces that caused a rupture in tradition, which reinforced the need to turn to other art forms for insight into the nature of literature. Because such inter-art borrowing was a defining feature of modernism, generalized or borrowed discussions of aesthetics had a particular influence on its articulation.

Thus, with the early forms of the epigraphic character, the character meditates on painting, as in *To the Lighthouse*, or on aesthetics in general, as in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Ulysses*. The subject of *Portrait* and, to some extent, *Ulysses* is the development of the artist and his artistic sensibilities. The subject of *To the Lighthouse* might be expressed as the consciousness of a houseful of particular people on a few particular days, or even the consciousness of a house itself, both when populated and

when abandoned. However we wish to define the subject of *To the Lighthouse*, we can certainly not constrain it to being about Lily Briscoe. And yet Lily Briscoe's meditations on art give us insight into the composition, or vision, as Dillard might say, of *To the Lighthouse*, just as Stephen Dedalus's lecture to Lynch on aesthetics provides a way – though not, I will argue, a correct way – of reading the composition of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Although the subjects are different, both novels meditate on their compositional features. Joyce and Woolf use the epigraphic character differently, of course. What's exciting about the epigraphic character is that, although we can define it, isolate it, identify it, and even trace its origins, the ways authors can and do use it are virtually unlimited. And, although it grows out of modernist concerns with art, modernist compositional structures, and modernist subjects, it is not bound to those concerns. The epigraphic character is modernist in origin, but structural in nature, and thus can appear in any novel about any subject.

*****

To the best of my knowledge, no one has yet written about the epigraphic character as such. While there are numerous books on readers in fiction, metafiction,[1] self-conscious fiction, and the like, there are no books on this particular metafictional phenomenon.[2] This is largely because metafiction and conventional fiction are often seen as mutually exclusive. John Gardner says in *The Art of Fiction* that "whatever

[1]Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as fiction that "self-consciously and systematically draw[s] attention to [its] status as . . . artefact[s] in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2).

[2] The epigraphic character has several precursors: Two of them are the *raisonneur*, in Greek tragedy, a commentator, a "choric figure [who] expresses ideas about the play's major issues and actions" (Roberts 804) and Henry James's *ficelle*, who, in addition to being "the reader's friend," is also a tool of the author (372).

interest or value [metafictional novels] have they derive from their contrast with 'traditional' – that is, 'conventional' or 'normal' – fiction" (49).[3] The epigraphic character, by critiquing fiction from within a conventional story, brings metafiction and conventional fiction together in a paradoxical, counterintuitive way – a way which suggests that the aims of metafiction and conventional fiction are not mutually exclusive.

There are, however, a few sentences scattered here and there throughout criticism that point towards the epigraphic character's existence and function. For instance, Randall Stevenson notes in his study on *Modern Fiction* that Wyndham Lewis's novel *Tarr* typifies

> modernist fiction's artistic self-consciousness: opinions about art not only reflect the views of the author, but relate directly to the novel in which they are expressed. Self-consciousness and a habit of self-portraiture extend into a kind of self-reflexiveness in which texts talk about their own methods, or artists discuss or demonstrate problems and priorities that also figure in the construction of the novel in which they appear. (164-165)

Stevenson continues his discussion by noting that "Woolf uses Lily's vision [in *To the Lighthouse*], Wyndham Lewis examines Tarr, and Lawrence follows some of the ideas of Gudrun and Loerke in *Women in Love* to reflect on the nature and construction of their own art" (165). Stevenson briefly mentions the role self-consciousness plays in the move from *bildungsroman* to *künstlerroman*, but he focuses on a more generalized and theoretical interest in self-reflexiveness and the problems of semiotics for modernist

---

[3] It should be noted that Gardner sets this argument up not as his own, but as "The traditionalist answer to the 'innovative fictionalist's'" general line of argument. But he argues the point so well and at such length, and the tone accords so well with the rest of the book, that it is difficult not to attribute the argument directly to Gardner.

literature. I'd like to develop his observation along different lines by investigating epigraphic characters and the dynamic they initiate. How do we understand what the author says about literature in these moments? How does the epigraphic dynamic work? To determine this, I've looked in depth at three related instances of the epigraphic character. This dissertation traces the development of the epigraphic character from James Joyce through Flann O'Brien and Graham Greene, three authors whose works are particularly related. I focus first on Joyce's creation of the figure, develop strategies for reading that figure, and then trace its development through O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* and Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, arguing that each used the figure in different ways, changing it in the process according to their own aptitudes and predispositions.

The ideas voiced by epigraphic characters range from Stephen Dedalus's multi-paged lecture to Lynch in the fifth chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to Maurice Bendrix's musings on questions of composition, authorship and divinity scattered throughout *The End of the Affair*. Epigraphic characters are comparable to narrators: whether a novel has a narrator or not, its tale is narrated. Likewise, a novel can reflect on itself without employing a special character to do so. Indeed, epigraphic characters are not special characters, but are only elevated to that level for brief moments, and then disappear into the story as otherwise "normal" characters. Their main function is as participants in the story. Epigraphic novels reflect on their methods from within themselves, through the limited perspectives of their characters, from within the story level. When a character takes up the role of epigraphic character, the author usually takes pains to make that character mimetically plausible; most epigraphic characters are characters who are likely to think, write, and talk about writing, literature, or art:

students, artists, writers, professors, and such. Epigraphic characters are full-fledged characters and pierce the membrane between story and discourse only during their epigraphic utterances, though they may be unaware that they're doing so. Wrapped up in the events of their own lives – the story – they are usually unaware of the ways in which their ideas about writing and their life-stories inform or negate each other. They are believable as characters because they are completely unconscious of themselves as literary creations. The fourth wall – the boundary between reality and what is portrayed, the boundary between story and discourse – though pierced, remains intact. In this way, the epigraphic novel is always conservative with respect to the integrity of the story, the cornerstone of the conventional novel, and the reader is tempted to read the epigraphic statements along conservative lines, as more narrowly about the novel in which they appear, rather than as statements about fictionality.

Stevenson, in talking about the modernist novel, assumes the relationship between the epigraphic character and author – and theory and practice – is straightforward: "opinions about art . . . reflect the views of the author. . . . [T]exts talk about their own methods, or artists discuss or demonstrate problems and priorities that also figure in the construction of the novel in which they appear." But the relationship between the epigraphic statement, the novel, and the author is rarely straightforward. A more tempered view than Stevenson's is that "all opinions about art relate to the author's concerns"; such a statement allows for the authorial ambivalence that often accounts for the very introduction of ideas about art in the fictional work. D. H. Lawrence, for instance, played out his ideas in the theater of fiction, using the dialogic aspects of the

novel to test and explore ideas.[4] And John Carey notes in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* that H. G. Wells used fiction in a similar manner to explore his ambivalence about "the masses."[5] In such instances, characters' ideas certainly do not represent "the author's ideas." As Bakhtin notes, "The language of the prose writer deploys itself according to degrees of greater or lesser proximity to the author and to his ultimate semantic instantiation. . . . The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master" (299-300).

Thus, while it may sometimes be true that ideas about art reflect the ideas of the author, the distance between characters' opinions about art and those of their writers varies widely. This distance not only provides a laboratory for testing ideas; it also becomes a favorite instrument of irony and ambiguity that gives the academic novel – often an epigraphic novel as well – its particular tone. David Lodge's introduction of Robyn Penrose in *Nice Work* illustrates, simultaneously, the testing of an artistic idea and its ironic and ambiguous use:

> And there, for the time being, let us leave Vic Wilcox, while we travel back an hour or two in time, a few miles in space, to meet a very different character. A character who, rather awkwardly for me, doesn't herself believe in the concept of character. That is to say (a favourite phrase of her own), Robyn Penrose, Temporary Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Rummidge, holds that "character" is a bourgeois myth, an illusion created to reinforce the ideology of capitalism. (21)

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[4] See the chapter on "Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin" In David Lodge's *After Bakhtin*, especially 60-65.
[5] See chapter 7, "H. G. Wells Against H. G. Wells," especially pages 139-142.

Although the narrator expresses discomfort at Robyn's theory of character, how Lodge's understanding of character relates to Robyn Penrose's, the narrator's, or the implied author's understanding of character is uncertain at best. Unless we find some statement by Lodge, in a nonfictional format, about literary character, we cannot assume that his stance on character is exactly equivalent to his characters', narrator's, or the implied author's. Robyn's disbelief in the notion of character when she is one herself is ironic. There is also an implicit testing of her ideas against the unspoken ideas of the narrator, the implied author, and arguably the author and reader. And ambiguity inheres in the unresolved question, which concept of character does this novel employ? Given this passage, and given Bakhtin's idea that "there are, finally, those words that are completely denied any authorial intentions: the author does not express *himself* in them . . . rather, he *exhibits* them as a unique speech-thing, they function for him as something completely reified" (299), we must fall back on the original formulation, slightly modified, and state that "opinions about art *relate* to the views of the author, and *always* relate directly to the novel in which they are expressed." Although the epigraphic character's ideas are distinct from the author's, the epigraphic character, in considering questions of literary composition, always points towards the real author. One of the outstanding qualities of epigraphic novels is the way they engage reality – usually the realities of authorship and literary theory – through the epigraphic character. The idea of authorship is discernable behind the epigraphic character's lineaments. The deliberate reference to the author's existence, function, and importance engages debates about authorship and reaffirms the author's role and importance in literature.

The use of epigraphic characters depends on a multileveled text that plays with the boundaries of and differences between the two basic narrative levels of story and discourse. Additionally, it hints at a third level: the real world in which the author and reader exist. All novels are composed of these three levels. A diagram of the structure of the novel would look something like this:

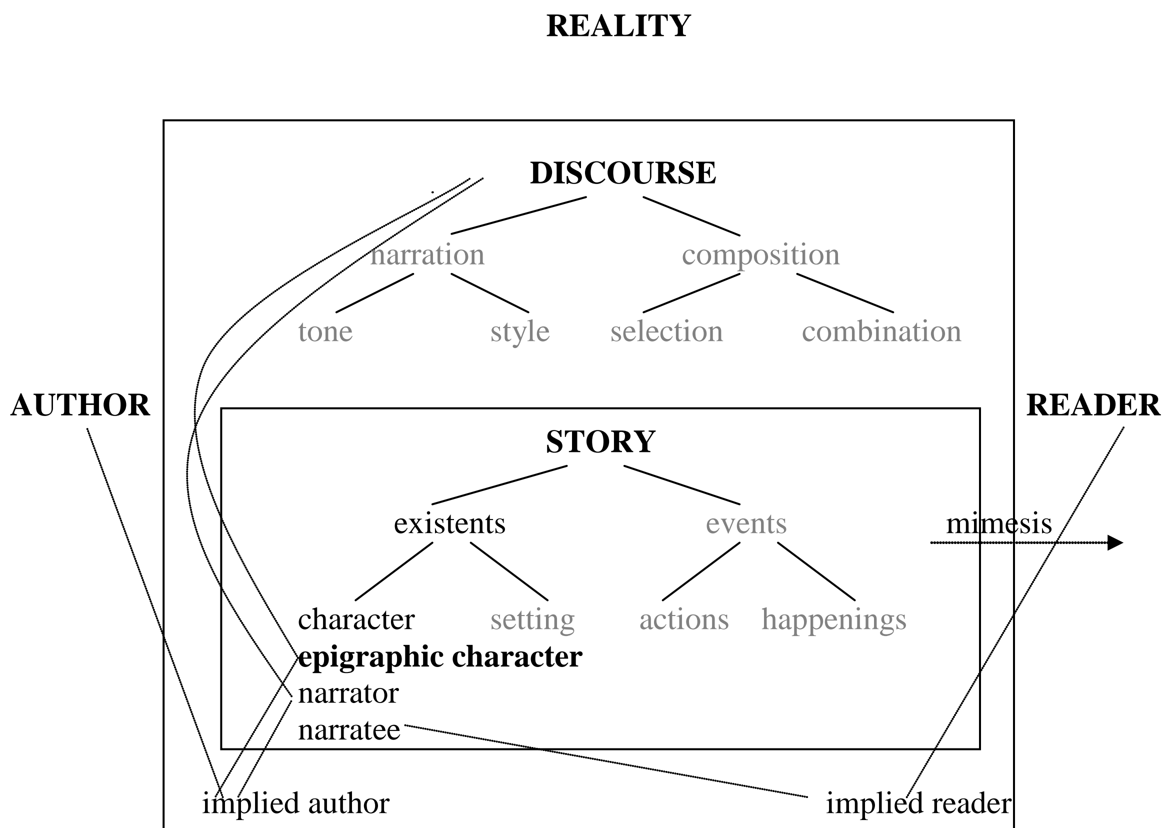

figure 1: the narratological structure of the novel, adapted from Seymour Chatman's model in *Story and Discourse*.

We are not immediately concerned with all of the categorizations in this diagram – events, and the distinction between happenings and actions, for instance, are not immediately pertinent to this study. David Lodge's definition of *fabula* and *sjuzet* will serve more clearly and succinctly than any I could formulate to distinguish the two main levels of the text: "The *fabula* is the story in the most objective, chronological form in which we can conceive it; the *sjuzet* is the representation of that story in an aesthetically motivated discourse, with all the gaps, elisions, rearrangements, repetitions and emphases which invest the story with meaning" ("Milan Kundera" 160). Rather than using the Russian terms, in this dissertation I use the term *story* instead of *fabula* and *discourse* instead of *sjuzet*. Chatman, in using the term *discourse*, focuses primarily on narration; I largely focus on how the story is composed.

Many figures in the novel can be said to operate on different levels of this textual structure, weaving them into the aesthetic whole we experience when we read. The narrator is the most familiar of these figures. Not all narrators operate visibly as characters, fading instead into the discourse. Narrators such as Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* and John Dowell in *The Good Soldier* wear their fictionality on their sleeves by participating in the story as characters, indicating the extent to which all narrators, even barely visible ones, are fictional. Such narrators, more than simply serving on the story level as other characters do, collude with the author to tell the story. In this way, they transgress the boundary between story and discourse, putting them in dialogue with each other. They also indicate, more powerfully than ordinary characters do, the presence of a writer speaking through them. Similarly, the epigraphic character serves on the story level and colludes with the author – not to tell the story, but to draw

attention to its construction. Epigraphic characters, then, also transgress the boundary between story and discourse, putting them in dialogue with each other, and indicate the presence of a writer behind their epigraphic utterances.

Transgressive aspects of literary structure are represented here by the dotted lines: the epigraphic character, when s/he utters an epigraphic statement, may seem to act as an implied author: what the character says may seem to speak to how the author composes or narrates the story. Thus, when the narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* states that he thinks a "good book may have three openings" (9), critics often have assumed that Flann O'Brien felt the same. Regardless of whether or not that's true (and I argue later that O'Brien does not hold the same opinion as his character here), the epigraphic character *seems* to take on this role. And when the connection is made from implied author to author – which happens frequently, as the implied author is often overlooked – story, discourse, and reality are linked. It is important to see these connections because authors sometimes use these connections to persuade their readers to understand reality in certain ways. Flann O'Brien joked that "[t]he novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer, could be despotic" (33); there's more truth to this statement than we usually assume. These connections among story, discourse, and reality provide a pathway for authors to link their stories to our worlds; if we are not careful to disentangle the levels of the text, we may find ourselves "outwitted in a shabby fashion" (32) as O'Brien said through his narrator – we might find that our understanding of reality is affected in ways that we would not normally concede.

Despite this dual-level functionality, epigraphic novels are not metafictions, but lie somewhere between conventional fiction and metafiction. The term metafiction has

not coalesced into a commonly accepted definition; here, I am using it to mean novels that decidedly focus on narrative construction rather than plot and character, and which, in Patricia Waugh's words, "self-consciously and systematically draw[s] attention to [their] status as . . . artefact[s] in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). Epigraphic novels are not primarily interested in the relationship between fiction and reality; they are, rather, concerned with the relationship between literature, life, aesthetics, and literary theory. By using the story level of the text, the epigraphic novel takes advantage of the pleasures that plot and character provide, to concisely verbalize ideas about fictional technique in a setting that tests how sound they are. Invested in plot, character, and theme, epigraphic novels critique themselves more obviously than they critique fiction, prose, or the novel as abstract concept, historical entity, or genre. The fact that the ideas about literature in epigraphic novels are espoused within literary works compels us to compare the idea with the work; thus, the epigraphic statement is local in application.

The transgressive aspects of literary structure (represented in the diagram by dotted lines), in which an element from one level influences operations on another level, are particularly interesting. The transgressions and dialogue among the various levels of the text are heightened in the epigraphic novel. These transgressions, mimesis being one of the most used and most widely recognized, enable a dialogic relationship among story, discourse, and reality that gives conventional fiction its seamless, holistic feel and that ties fiction to the real world. Extensive reliance on these transgressions and on dialogic relationships among the levels of the novel give the epigraphic novel its particular feel – the eerie feeling that although the story is fictional, the novel says something that is real

in a very specific way, something that exceeds the boundaries of the story and its telling. This is a result of the epigraphic novel's self-referentiality. Metafiction, on the other hand, amplifies this dialectical relationship to the breaking point.

When the epigraphic statement is compared with other aspects of the novel, a dialectical relationship is initiated. Theory and practice synthesize into a third entity: what the book, as a whole, says. The process is similar to the reconstruction of static irony that Wayne Booth describes in *A Rhetoric of Irony* – briefly, the "reader is required to reject the literal meaning," "[a]lternative interpretations or explanations are tried out," and then a "decision [is] made about the author's knowledge or beliefs," and "we . . . finally choose a new meaning or cluster of meanings with which we can rest secure" (10-14).[6] Reading an epigraphic novel is an inherently dialogic process. I hesitate to say that the process is always dialectical, because I imagine that synthesis is not always possible, since reconstruction is not always possible with irony. Booth calls such unreconstructable irony "unstable"; an unstable epigraphic dynamic seems at least as plausible as unstable irony. The process of reading an epigraphic novel also has rhetorical workings and implications similar to those Booth writes of in *A Rhetoric of Irony.* The active reading required to understand irony or the epigraphic dynamic requires a connection between author and reader. With the epigraphic novel, the presence of a passage that muses on writing or literature alerts the reader to the epigraphic nature of the novel. The reader then attempts a synthesis of the epigraphic statement and the fiction. Booth describes the rhetorical situation in which a reader

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[6] Although in this case, the first step is less a rejection of the literal meaning and more of an acknowledgement that the theory demands comparison with the novel. The other steps in the synthesis flow from this step and therefore differ somewhat from the reconstruction of ironic meaning that Booth describes.

understands a piece of stable irony as a kind of "meeting of the minds" between the author and the reader.[7] Although the synthesis of the epigraphic dynamic may not elicit the same sense of confidence in the interpretation as a reconstruction of stable irony might, the rhetorical relationship between author and reader is similar. The reader strives to understand the author's deeper meaning, the meaning that is not simply the epigraphic statement or the story but is the result of the two in dialogue. Epigraphic novels involve a kind of decorum in which the work squares not with morality or social mores, as Frye tells us typical comedies do, but with its own artistic rules. In this squaring or resolution, we finally understand what the novel says: we read the novel's totality against its epigraphic pronouncements, weigh the two against each other, and decide what they say when taken together. We reconstruct the meaning the author intended us to understand by the juxtaposition of theory and fiction.

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Because the epigraphic character operates in the manner outlined above, I have analyzed the epigraphic character along biographical, dialogical, rhetorical, and narratological lines in the three novels addressed by this dissertation. I have also addressed the epigraphic character along literary historical lines, in order to show how it developed and has evolved. Different writers require different approaches because of the more (or less) biographical nature of their use of the epigraphic character, because of the kind of criticism that has grown up (or not) around the writer, and because of the use to which the writer puts the epigraphic character. In all cases, however, I have found it necessary not only to closely analyze the epigraphic passages, but also to consider the

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[7] See especially pages 13-14.

placement of the epigraphic passages in the novel, and what aspects of the novel the passage refers to – what themes are brought up, for instance. I have also found it necessary to consider any presentations of writers writing, which provides an additional context for the epigraphic passages. When Stephen Dedalus praises aesthetic distance, for instance, but composes his villanelle according to what moves him, it changes how we understand the epigraphic statement.

I have used a biographical approach in uncovering the roots of the epigraphic characters in James Joyce's evolution to author during the years *Portrait* was being worked and reworked into its final shape. Joyce was growing and changing, as both an artist and a person, in these years. He was simultaneously reworking his understanding of how literature works and writing about his younger literary self. Both his juvenile and mature understandings of literature are represented in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and the concept of the epigraphic character helps us to disentangle those understandings. Such an approach, however, necessitates writing a focused biography of Joyce's life between 1904 and 1914. The biographical approach also includes my consideration of what Flann O'Brien read, Greene's interest in religion, and other things that can be found in the biographies, letters, and drafts of the novels. Biography gives us a sense of what an author's aims might be; it gives us a foothold, however slippery, in reality. It is not an easy tool to wield: lives change, material is unavailable, and people sometimes hide things. It does, however, offer us a second perspective from which to calibrate truth.

Each chapter in this dissertation takes a particular epigraphic novel as its topic. The chapters are arranged chronologically. The epigraphic character has its modern roots

in James Joyce, I argue, as much because he has served as a model for writers in his wake as because he used Stephen Dedalus to voice the opinion of his younger self, reserving the text around those epigraphic utterances to contextualize his juvenile understanding in terms of his more mature understanding. This chapter delves the most deeply into the biographical material. It took Joyce ten years to write *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and during that time he abandoned writing his "Aesthetics" and abandoned *Stephen Hero*, the early draft of the novel. He also committed himself to Nora Barnacle – though they were not married at the time, Joyce was deeply committed to their life together, and treated his relationship with Nora as a kind of marriage. He had two children, tried several careers, and struggled to find a creed that suited him, which he eventually found in his own particular kind of love. This chapter first discusses Joyce's aesthetics, his belief in an "ardent life," and the early versions of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, then tells the story of Joyce's life between 1904 and 1914, focusing on those elements bearing on his use of the epigraphic character. The chapter then treats the epigraphic portion of *Portrait*, when Stephen Dedalus explains his aesthetic theory to Lynch. I read the aesthetic theory in terms of the interpolated text – Lynch's responses, for instance – and in terms of the preceding and succeeding passages. The latter of these, Stephen's composition of the villanelle to Emma, I treat in some depth. It bears a striking and significant resemblance to the erotic letters Joyce sent to Nora when he was away in Ireland in 1909. He bared his soul to Nora in these letters, and in doing so found literary and personal value in accepting a radical catholicity of emotion, one that he celebrated by setting *Ulysses* on June 16, 1904 as an homage not only to love and Nora, but to this peculiar kind of compassion, this acceptance of all human emotion.

In the second chapter, I argue that Flann O'Brien reified the epigraphic character in *At Swim-Two-Birds*: his extensive use of the epigraphic character in that novel drew attention to it among writers, and deeply affected how they understood it. I discuss O'Brien's ambivalent relation to Joyce, and try to read him on his own terms: as a satirist in love with play, complications, logical puzzles and tricks, who kept his own life as private as possible. Finding meaning in *At Swim-Two-Birds* is not the point, because for O'Brien, meaning wasn't the end of the novel; fun was. I examine the primary epigraphic passages in the novel and show how they function as a controlling aesthetic vision for the narrator's novel rather than as a statement O'Brien himself makes. I show how O'Brien engages many of the same themes as Joyce, lampooning Stephen Dedalus as a lazy student writer, a type that novelists after him, such as Kate Atkinson, have taken up. This chapter also shows that O'Brien was not simply making fun of Joyce, but of other writers as well, including Bertolt Brecht, whose A-effect was worked into the epigraphic statements of *At Swim* and thus had a great impact on modern metafiction.

The third chapter addresses Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, finding in it "ghost references"[8] to James Joyce. Greene read *At Swim-Two-Birds* for the publisher Longman's, and esteemed it highly. The chapter first addresses Greene's connection to Joyce and O'Brien, which contextualize what he does with the epigraphic character in *The End of the Affair.* Maurice Bendrix is a novelist, and throughout *The End of the Affair* he talks about writing; he does so in ways that conceive of writing as God-like in various ways. I argue that Greene uses the concepts of *logos* and *kairos* in both their rhetorical and religious connotations to restore a "cosmic dimension" which he thought the novel lost with the advent of modernism (Greene "François"). In doing so, he seems

to understand himself as arguing against Joyce's placing love at the center of the novel, arguing instead for compassion as something that contextualizes and sanctifies human suffering.

But the most important aspect of this dissertation is its identification of the epigraphic character, who has not, so far as I know, been identified as such. Aside from literary historical considerations, biographical considerations, or the considerations of any particular author, novel, or thematic concerns, the epigraphic character is important as a structural feature of fiction. The epigraphic character is not, in other words, merely a means for authors to voice ideas about literature through a mouthpiece; it is a character already embedded in the story. The author uses that embedded aspect to initiate a dynamic around whatever the epigraphic character has to say. It is this structural functioning of the epigraphic character that is its most important aspect: this dynamic is how the epigraphic character works to express, critique, and play with ideas about fiction within fiction. And it is this aspect of the epigraphic character that shows us how closely related fiction and metafiction really are.

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[8] See chapter 3, page 155.

CHAPTER TWO

"Pitiful Compassion": The Roots of the Modern Epigraphic Character in the Making of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

In the fifth chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, in a conversation with his friend Lynch, expounds an aesthetic theory. This theory is based on Joyce's own aesthetics, and so is related to what Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain call "workshop materials": the scraps and context that guided Joyce in the creation of *Portrait* and "which throw light on the development of Joyce's artistic theory and practice as he worked toward his finished novel" (Joyce, *Workshop* xi). It is also related to what John Whittier-Ferguson calls "framing pieces": literary "scraps loosely assembled around the peripheries of a poem, an essay, a novel" which guide readers' understanding of the work (3). Joyce's schema for *Ulysses*, then, are framing pieces: bits of extra-literary text that modernist writers released to guide the public's reading of their works. But Stephen Dedalus's aesthetic theory lies between workshop materials and framing pieces; it comes neither before nor after the work, but squarely in the realm of fiction, where different rules apply. Because *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is an aesthetically challenging novel, readers and critics often hope that Stephen's theory might present a key to the novel; they hope to get from it what they get from a framing piece – guidance – or what they get from workshop materials – insight. But the fictionality of Stephen's theory presents immediate problems to such an effort. These problems are only amplified when the author is Joyce, for whom the relationship between

biography and fiction is particularly troubling. These problems become particularly complicated when we consider that, although this segment of the novel is based on Joyce's own jottings toward a codified aesthetics, Joyce abandoned the effort after having written only a few pages of notes. Stephen Dedalus's literary theory is an epigraphic utterance, and it initiates an epigraphic dynamic that is particularly enmeshed with the events of Joyce's life during the composition of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This dynamic is wrapped up in Joyce's navigating the difference between codified theories of literature and the lived experience that writing both is and represents in its pages. This difference, in turn, is wrapped up for Joyce in the necessity to write, to support his family, to sustain his spirit, and to accept and celebrate a broad range of sexuality, morality, and experience. This chapter discusses Joyce's biography during the years he wrote *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in order to show how the development of those concerns affected the epigraphic dynamic of the novel.

Critics have paid considerable attention to the aesthetic theory Stephen Dedalus expounds in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, often taking it as a guide to Joyce's work, much as we might take a framing piece. Peter Faulkner, in *The English Modernist Reader, 1910-1930*, takes it as a guide to modernist fiction in general; he publishes it alongside critical work by other modernist writers, as if its being fictional does not affect its meaning. And Jacques Aubert has tried to reconstruct, from Stephen's theory and other fragments, James Joyce's own aesthetics. Countless others have pursued Joyce's allusions, arguing with Joyce's understanding of Aristotle, Aquinas, and others, or have used the writings of such figures to try to plumb the full implications of Joyce's own aesthetics. Critics have not agreed on how to approach this theory, but most agree,

implicitly, to overlook the theory's fictional setting, which is what is most troubling and interesting about the theory – how it is spoken by a character likely to speak it, interrupted by a character likely to have little patience with it, and woven into the very fabric of the story.[9]

Joyce was serious about writing an aesthetics when he was twenty-one and in Paris for medical school. He wrote to his mother on 20 March 1903, "I read every day in the Bibliothèque Nationale and every night in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève" (*Letters* 38). In *The Aesthetics of James Joyce*, Jacques Aubert tells us that Joyce "placed his aesthetic in a carefully planned literary program," and quotes from the same letter to May Joyce: "My book of songs will be published in the spring of 1907. My first comedy about five years later. My 'Aesthetic' about five years later again (This *must* interest you!)" (Aubert 2-3; *Letters* 38). But although Joyce took his aesthetics seriously early in his life, his interest in them waned. Joyce never published his "Aesthetic." The only surviving "aesthetics," published after Joyce's death, are the so-called "Paris Notebook," which he wrote in February and March 1903, and the so-called "Pola Notebook," written in November 1904, only a month after Joyce moved to the European continent with Nora Barnacle (CW 141). Both notebooks together comprise only six pages in *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*.

Joyce's brother Stanislaus wrote in *My Brother's Keeper* that this aesthetics, "if he had completed it, would have been the manifesto of his faith as an artist. . . . [O]nly his change of life when he came back to Dublin and fell in with a hard-drinking group of students, chiefly medical, who made a dead set at him with the privily announced

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[9] Theodore Spencer, who edited and introduced *Stephen Hero*, the draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is a notable exception.

intention of leading him to ruin himself, prevented him from finishing it" (*MBK* 232). Since Joyce took his aesthetics so seriously and then dropped them without a word, we must recognize that the existing aesthetics are not meant as an authoritative comment on his work. Most properly, they are juvenilia, and we can imagine that Joyce felt about them something rather like what he felt about *Chamber Music*, which "he practically disowned" (S. Joyce, "Early" 897). Stanislaus Joyce tells us that

> in his own literary work in English he now seemed to gaze with ironic skepticism at the ideal which had dominated him so tyrannically and to consider his deluded youth with pitiful compassion. . . . Joyce wanted to cable [the publisher] at the very last moment to suspend publication, because he thought that the sentiment of the poems was false. A great deal of effort was required to keep him from doing so. (*Recollections* 26).

In one of his more generous moments towards the book, Joyce wrote "it is a young man's book. I felt like that" (*Letters* 219). Since Joyce neither allowed his aesthetics to be published nor finished them, we can only imagine that he would feel even more adamantly that they were a young man's words, inadequate to supplement his later, more mature work.

Stanislaus Joyce was right to see his brother's carousing as the reason he never finished his aesthetics, although more than just drinking precluded them. Joyce, at this point, saw his drinking as a way of living an ardent life. On 31 July 1904, Stanislaus wrote in his diary, "Jim says that his ambition in life is to burn with a hard and gemlike ecstasy" (*CDD* 46). Numerous other times, Stanislaus recorded Joyce's credo and how Joyce lived it out: "Jim wants to live," he wrote a month later: "Life is his creed" (31

August 1904, *CDD* 51). Earlier, in 1903, Stanislaus wrote, "He has made living his end in life, and in the light of this magnificent importance of living, everything else is like a rushlight in the sun. And so he is more interested in the sampling of liqueurs, the devising of dinners, the cares of dress, and whoring, than to know if the one-act play – 'the dwarf-drama,' he calls it – is an artistic possibility" (*CDD* 2-3). This obsession with an ardent life encompassed more than just drinking and superfluities, and it was more than a passing adolescent phase: it became a replacement, as Stanislaus foresaw, for Joyce's aesthetics, but it also replaced the whole set of inherited social rules for life that Joyce was not able to accept. This credo caused Joyce to go through a number of major life changes that provided the "new experience" he required to birth *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.[10]

Stanislaus was keenly aware of the many paradoxes of thought and behavior that Joyce's new credo brought about, and he was concerned that Joyce's zeal for an ardent life might preclude his writing entirely. But Joyce himself did not see his credo of life as being at odds with anything, at first: "I am sure," he wrote to Stanislaus shortly after he arrived on the continent with Nora, "that there cannot be any substitute for the individual passion as the motive power of everything – art and philosophy included" (Feb 7, 1905, *Letters* 81). In Joyce's view, a zest for life drove everything, and so could not logically get in the way of anything. But it got in the way of a formalized aesthetics, since it was inherently opposed to imposed organization, as Stanislaus knew:

> He tries to live on a principle of impulse. The Principle itself is an impulse, not a conviction. He is a polytheist. What pleases him for the moment is his god for

[10] "When we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction I require a new terminology and a new personal experience," Stephen tells Lynch in *A Portrait* (209).

> the moment. He demands an absolute freedom to do as he pleases. He wants the freedom to do wrong whether he uses it or no, and for fear he should be deceiving himself by any back thought he is vindicating his right to ruin himself. He accepts no constraint, not even self-constraint, and regards a forced growth, however admirable in itself, as an impossible satisfaction. This kind of life is naturally highly unsatisfactory and his conduct bristles with contradictions. For instance, he practises exercises for the voice regularly; he works at his novel nearly every day saying that he wants to get his hand into such training that style will be as easy to him as singing. (*CDD* 52)

"Individual passion" – or impulse, as Stanislaus called it – provided the "motive power" for Joyce's literature: it was already impelling him to practice his singing and novel-writing. But it did not power Joyce's aesthetics, chiefly because a codified aesthetics is a different kind of undertaking, its creativity one of categorization rather than invention, composition, or practice. This zest for life led to many other problems as well. Living fully meant finding a way to fit everything he wanted to do into his life and into each day. Stanislaus was right that Joyce was deceiving himself on this point: Joyce would, in the years to come, care very deeply about "the things that go to make up life"; he cared chiefly about having enough money and time to write and support his family. These, too, became part of Joyce's ardent life.

Joyce's drive to create an aesthetics reached its peak and fell away during the long compositional process of *Portrait*. The demands of the major changes Joyce underwent as he wrote *A Portrait* forced him to reevaluate the need for an aesthetic theory and to abandon it for the more cagey epigraphic utterance: a fictionalized aesthetics which Joyce

cannot be held to because it is fictional, but which can nonetheless help the reader navigate this difficult novel. What emerged as his aesthetics bears more similarity to the "ardent life" theory of literature than to the "aesthetics." What Joyce experienced between 1904 and 1914 changed what he thought was important in literature, and changed the aesthetics he believed in. *Portrait* reflects, often in very specific ways, these changes. We can only understand the aesthetics in chapter five of *Portrait* in light of that series of biographical changes.

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On January 7, 1904, after he wrote the Paris Notebook and before he wrote the Pola notebook, Joyce wrote a short story called "A Portrait of the Artist," his first attempt at what would ten years later become *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The short story was not published in Joyce's lifetime. "A Portrait of the Artist" is a strange piece; Chester G. Anderson calls it an essay (Joyce, "Portrait" 257n), and Ellmann remarks in his biography that "It is difficult to say whether what he wrote was essay or story, for it has elements of both, the essay strained by apostrophe and dramatic exhortation, the narrative presented for the most part discursively" (149). There is no aesthetic theory in "A Portrait," which is too short and too essayistic to incorporate such a digression, but the story does begin with a statement that neatly encapsulates the architectonics of the future *Portrait*:

> The features of infancy are not commonly reproduced in the adolescent portrait for, so capricious are we, that we cannot or will not conceive the past in any other than its iron, memorial aspect. Yet the past assuredly implies a fluid succession

> of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only. Our world, again, recognizes its acquaintance chiefly by the characters of beard and inches and is, for the most part, estranged from those of its members who seek through some art, by some process of the mind as yet untabulated, to liberate from the personalized lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts. But for such as these a portrait is not an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion. (257-258)[11]

The piece feels like an essay partly because of the opening. It focuses on ideas rather than on setting or character, as a realist story might, so that it sounds very much like an essay: it opens with a thesis and seems as if it will launch into a full-fledged argument. It does not do so, although the beginning of the second paragraph is very essayistic also. In this paragraph, the main character is first mentioned, but only as "the subject of this portrait." Later, Joyce refers to him only with pronouns. Combined with the discursiveness Ellmann notes and the total lack of dialogue, it is easy to see this piece as more essay than story.

But since the novel, according to Bakhtin, is essentially dialogic, made of a hodge-podge of various discourses, this piece is more properly fiction that relies heavily on the essay form. It is not the ideal piece of fiction, certainly – its use of essayistic discourse is totally uncontrolled, and it is not balanced by enough markers of conventional fiction to feel like a story. At the same time, however, this kind of essayistic opening is a hallmark of modernist and proto-modernist novels that use an idea

[11] Chester G. Anderson writes in the introduction to "A Portrait" that Joyce "gave one of his clearest statements of the intention which remained constant for later versions of the *Portrait*" (257), and quotes this excerpt in part.

as their *raison d'être* and often set it out in the first sentences of the novel. We see in its explanation of an idea the opening of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

> Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habits, to have new little hopes. It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future: but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen.[12]

We also see in it the opening of *Anna Karenina* – "All happy families are the same; all unhappy families are unhappy in their own unique way" – and in Dostoevsky's works in general. Joyce's short "Portrait" is not an essay, but the work of a young writer struggling to find a form that can express his ideas, struggling to find a way to interweave idea and story, and often telling rather than showing. "A Portrait" is the early formal experimentation of a literary groundbreaker. Joyce's struggle with the novel based on an idea laid the groundwork for his invention of the epigraphic character.

"A Portrait of the Artist" was rejected by John Eglinton and Fred Ryan, the editors of *Dana*, the new Dublin magazine Joyce had written the piece for. Stanislaus's diary entry on Joyce's birthday (February 2) in 1904, tells us that Joyce had "half in anger" "decided to turn his paper into a novel, and having come to that decision is just as glad, he says, that it was rejected" (*CDD* 12,11). Five weeks after he first penned the short "Portrait," Joyce had written the first chapter of *Stephen Hero* (Ellmann 153), and had, by the end of March 1904, written eleven chapters (S. Joyce, *CDD* 19-20).

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[12] Lawrence too was playing with the epigraphic character by telling us, after this opening, that these are Constance Chatterley's thoughts and not the narrator's or his own. He too is playing with the convention of opening a novel with an idea.

The style of *Stephen Hero* is trying. Partly this is because of larger compositional and stylistic choices Joyce made, consciously or not.[13] Whereas the narration of *A Portrait* is limited to Stephen's point of view and focused on his character, *Stephen Hero* is told from an omniscient point of view, and while the story centers on Stephen, it concerns itself with how other characters perceive and react to him – a concern that is strikingly omitted in *Portrait*. A single example from *Stephen Hero* should suffice to demonstrate its different narrative technique and focus. If you have read *Portrait*, notice when you realize whom the passage is about:

> He was always interested in novelties, childishly interested and receptive, and this new name and the phenomena it had produced in his house were novelties for him. He made no attempt to discredit his wife's novel development but he resented both that she should have achieved it unaided by him and that she should be able thereby to act as intermediary between him and his son. He condemned as inopportune but not discredited his son's wayward researches into strange literature and, though a similar taste was not discoverable in him, he was prepared to commit that most pious of heroisms namely the extension of one's sympathies late in life in deference to the advocacy of a junior. Following the custom of certain old-fashioned people who can never understand why their patronage or judgments should put men of letters into a rage he chose his play from the title. A metaphor is a vice that attracts the mind by reason of its falsity and danger so that, after all, there is something to be said, nothing voluminous perhaps, but at least a word of concession for that class of society which in literature as in everything

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[13] For instance, Joyce wanted *Stephen Hero* to cover a much longer time period than *A Portrait*, and in much greater detail: "The U. College episode will take about ten chapters" (*Letters* 86). He planned 63

> else goes always with its four feet on the ground. Mr. Dedalus, anyhow, suspected that *A Doll's House* would be a triviality in the manner of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and, as he had never been even unofficially a member of that international society which collects and examines psychical phenomena, he decided that *Ghosts* would probably be some uninteresting story about a haunted house. He chose *The League of Youth* in which he hoped to find the reminiscences of like-minded roysters and, after reading through two acts of provincial intrigue, abandoned the enterprise as tedious. (87-88)

The narration of *Portrait* is not nearly so verbose and inflated. *Portrait* is concerned with how Stephen Dedalus perceives his world; *Stephen Hero* is more concerned with how the people in Stephen Dedalus's world perceive him.[14] In *A Portrait*, such a long passage about "he" would certainly be about Stephen. While *Portrait* does sketch Simon's character for us, it does so much more economically, through Stephen's eyes and reported dialogue, not by summing up his interior life and editorializing on it. We would never find the narrator in *Portrait* interjecting his opinion about metaphor or any other matter, literary or otherwise. This is an important difference: Because *Portrait* is told through Stephen's eyes, Joyce could distance himself from any literary opinions in the novel which he might choose to disown personally, while still broadcasting those opinions to his audience, allowing them to use those opinions in making sense of the novel without his having to stand behind them or say anything definitive himself. Because these opinions are always tied to Stephen, they are always rooted in time. While an omniscient narrator's opinions exist in the eternity of the literary present, Stephen's opinions exist in

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chapters (*Letters* 83).

[14] See Levin, 404-405.

chronological, fictional, time. In the change between the two novels and their two ways of narrating literary opinion, the epigraphic character was born, in a deliberate effort at obfuscation.[15] Not only does a character voice the opinion, but that character corresponds to a point in Joyce's past. The epigraphic utterances are doubly distanced from Joyce.

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In the years Joyce struggled with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he changed radically as a person. He committed himself to Nora Barnacle and had two children with her. He struck out on his own, and negotiated his family relationships, his spiritual life, his working life, and his writing life. He lived in several countries. Joyce was forging his life as a father, a sort-of husband, and a writer. During that period, he changed radically, and his ideas about writing and aesthetics changed along with him. Early on, he worked hard on his novel. From the first chapter of *Stephen Hero* onwards, Joyce composed at the quick pace of more than a chapter a month. For a year and a half, from February 1904 to July 1905, through moves from Dublin to Zurich to Trieste to Pola and to Trieste again, through the beginning and first troubled months of his "marriage" to Nora Barnacle, through his first steady job, through the drafting of the bulk of *Dubliners* and the conception and gestation of his first child, through the conception and gestation of himself as a man – Joyce was only twenty-two when he left Dublin, and twenty-three

[15] It is partly for this reason that many critics want to find out exactly how autobiographical a character Stephen Dedalus is. They want to know if what Stephen says about literature Joyce says too. The effort is always doomed to failure, however: The autobiographical extent of *Portrait* is and always will be unclear, despite the persuasiveness of any critical arguments one way or the other, mainly because Joyce was trying to be cagey. It is also worth noting that critics are not interested in how much Stephen corresponds to Stanislaus Joyce. There is ample evidence suggesting that Stephen is largely an amalgam of Stanislaus and James, with his dourness coming mainly from Stanislaus.

when his son was born – through all these milestones, Joyce worked hard and steadily on the novel. He wrote to Stanislaus on July 12, 1905,

> You will remember the circumstances in which I left Ireland nine months ago. Like everything else that I have done in my life it was an experiment. I can hardly say with truth that it was an experiment which has failed seeing that in those nine months I have begotten a child, written 500 pages of my novel, written 3 of my stories, learned German and Danish fairly well, besides discharging the intolerable (to me) duties of my position and swindling two tailors. I believe, besides, that I write much better now than when I was in Dublin. (*Letters* 92-93)

This is truly an impressive catalog of achievements, and more impressive when one considers that Joyce left out moving three times, twice to a foreign country, and becoming a father and head of household. Joyce, as he often does in his letters, relied on litany to make his case, and in so doing, he emphasized the more superficial changes he made. But although he missed the profundity of the changes he failed to mention, he did end with one of the greatest changes of all: that this development greatly affected his writing. The effect on his writing was not always positive, but it was always profound. The most trying time, for his writing, came as a result of his failing to recognize how profoundly his metamorphosis was affecting both himself and his writing, and his failing to address these changes.

New adulthood is a difficult period for anyone, but for Joyce, it was especially difficult. Financially, he was destitute. Personally, he reeled from the chaotic state of his family and from his mother's recent death. Socially, he could not accept most of the conventions handed down to him, which left him at a psychological disadvantage as well:

it is hard to find your place in a social system you find yourself at odds with. Spiritually, he was lost as well, experimenting with theosophy (Ellmann 103) and other alternatives to conventional Irish Catholicism. He was also at odds with the vast majority of the literary community. There was little foundation on which for Joyce to build a life. As he wrote to Nora on 29 August 1904, a little more than a month before they left Ireland for the continent together,

> My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity—home, the recognised virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines. How could I like the idea of home? My home was simply a middle-class affair ruined by spendthrift habits which I have inherited. My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father's ill-treatment, by years of trouble, and by my cynical frankness of conduct. When I looked on her face as she lay in her coffin—a face grey and wasted with cancer—I understood that I was looking on the face of a victim and I cursed the system which had made her a victim. We were seventeen in family. My brothers and sisters are nothing to me. One brother alone is capable of understanding me.
>
> Six years ago I left the Catholic Church, hating it most fervently. I found it impossible for me to remain in it on account of the impulses of my nature. I made secret war upon it when I was a student and declined to accept the positions it offered me. By doing this I made myself a beggar but I retained my pride. Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do. I cannot enter the social order except as a vagabond. I started to study medicine three times, law once, music once. A week ago I was arranging to go away as a travelling actor. (*Letters* 48).

Joyce was probably borrowing from his brother Charlie's biography when he wrote that he was arranging to go away as a traveling actor (S. Joyce, *MBK* 250-1), but one can recognize the exaggeration and theft, even appreciate its artful appropriateness, and still understand the truth of Joyce's situation. We must understand Joyce's first attempt at adult life in this context, and we must understand his first novel in this context as well: he could not write a *künstlerroman* until he reached the end of his own *bildungsroman* – until he entered the social order, not as a vagabond but as a husband (of sorts), a father, and a writer.

It is also in this context that Joyce struggled with his relationship with Nora. This struggle would greatly affect his understanding of his sexuality, which would in turn affect his aesthetics and how he expressed them. For much of the beginning of their life together, Joyce considered leaving Nora. There are hints in earlier letters that things were dire between Nora and Joyce, including a note Joyce passed across a table to Nora in a café about a month before they finally settled in Austria, beginning "For God's sake do not let us be any way unhappy tonight. If there is anything wrong please tell me" (December 1904, *Letters* 74). By July 1905, Joyce was pouring out a long description of his problems with Nora in a voluminous letter to Stanislaus, admitting that he was "quite sure (it is her own statement) that [Nora] cannot live this life with me much longer" (12 July 1905, *Letters* 92-98). Brenda Maddox writes that Joyce thought "perhaps the only right thing was to take her back to an environment suitable to her temperament – in other words, Ireland" (62-63), but it is clear Joyce did not originally think of accompanying Nora. Every sentence about returning to Ireland was about "her": "I can see no prospect of her being happy if she continues to live this life here. . . . I think that her health and

happiness would be much improved if she were to live a life more suited to her temperament" (12 July 1905, *Letters* 95). Joyce added himself in enigmatically: "I don't think it right that even I should complain if the untoward phenomenon of 'love' should cause disturbance, even in so egotistically regulated a life as mine" (12 July 1905, *Letters* 95).

Joyce was troubled by the difficulties that he and Nora experienced, but he was even more troubled that he could not imagine any viable alternatives. The only options he knew were those of the social order he rejected. In a letter to his aunt Josephine on 4 December, 1905, Joyce wrote

> I imagine you must be tired hearing my explicit or implicit complaints about my present life and therefore I shall not trouble you with many in this letter. You are not to argue from this that I am in the least resigned. In fact I am simply waiting for a little financial change which will enable me to change my life. . . . I have hesitated before telling you that I imagine the present relations between Nora and myself are about to suffer some alteration. . . . I do not wish to rival the atrocities of the average husband and I shall wait till I see my way more clearly. . . . I am not sure that the thousands of households which are with difficulty held together by memories of dead sentiments have much right to reproach me with inhumanity. (*Letters* 128-129)

For Joyce, conventional social arrangements meant domestic abuse, and were not an option. He was horrified by violence of any kind, and he could only see the outcome of a troubled relationship as such "atrocity" or, at best, as an anxious stasis. But Joyce was as unwilling to live in a perpetually troubled relationship as he was to get married.

Nonetheless, he was also unhappy with the idea of leaving Nora; he considered it for a few years, with some urgency at times, but with at least as much caution and gravity as desire. The prospect of inertia, of an anxious stasis, must have bothered him as much as the prospect of violence, given how fervently he held an ardent life as sacred. In fact, an ardent life remained central to his ethos and his own personal theology, but the idea was profoundly changed by a marriage that, rather than ending or erupting into violence, blossomed in startling ways, which would affect not only his life but his fiction as well, and would lead to the peculiar lineaments of the first epigraphic character. For Joyce, it was all part and parcel of forging a life that rang true to his own ethos and his own soul. Doubtless, the conundrum was aggravated by the difficulty of establishing the rest of his life without reference to convention.

At the same time as Joyce searched for new rules to live by, he tried to establish his own rules for literature, rules to write by. The two were inextricably intertwined, for Joyce: literature needed to reflect life, reality. On 19 November, 1904, scarcely more than a month after Joyce moved to the continent,[16] Joyce wrote to his brother Stanislaus, "I have written . . . about five long pages of 'Esthetic Philosophy'" (*Letters* 71). This is the so-called "Pola Notebook. " It was the last work he did on his "Aesthetics." That Joyce stopped working on his aesthetics shortly after he embarked on his new life, when he was fully confronted with the necessity of carving out a life for himself apart from convention, can hardly be a coincidence. Joyce wanted to write in a way that was true to experience; when experience forced him to truly grapple with and shed himself of social rules, it was not long until he shed himself of literary rules as well.

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[16] Joyce left Dublin on the evening of October 8, 1904 and arrived in Zurich on October 11 (*Letters* lvi, 59, 66).

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In the midst of this turmoil, progress on *Stephen Hero* continued unabated, as did work on several of Joyce's other projects. In fact, progress on *Stephen Hero* did not slow until Giorgio was born, according to the evidence of the letters, when it screeched to a halt.[17] In the first year or so that he lived abroad, before Giorgio was born, Joyce managed to sustain the idea that he could make his living primarily as a writer. As he wrote to Stanislaus in December 1904, "I desire more money and liberty than I have at present and for this reason I am working at the novel" (28 December 1904, *Letters* 75). But the pace at which he wrote is not a pace most could keep up for long while working as he did. He was banking on his intense effort's paying off before long, banking on the money from some published work subsidizing his writing career and allowing him to give up teaching. Instead, after less than a year he got more responsibility and grew quickly exhausted. The results of overworking and insufficiently addressing the profound shifts in his life came to a head.

On 28 February 1906, he expressed his frustration over his inability to balance his financial needs with his writing to his publisher, Grant Richards, with whom he thought he was finalizing the contract for *Dubliners*:

> You have asked me to tell you what I am doing and what my prospects are. I am an English teacher here in a Berlitz School. I have been here for sixteen months during which time I have achieved the delicate task of living and of supporting two other trusting souls on a salary of £80 a year. I am employed to

> teach young men of this city the English language as quickly as possible with no delays for elegance and receive in return tenpence for every sixty minutes so spent. I must not omit to mention that I teach also a baroness.
>
> My prospects are the chance of getting money enough from my book or books to enable me to resume my interrupted life. I hope these details will not bore you as much as they bore me. (*Letters* 131)

The tone of the letter shows that Joyce was less bored than frustrated, and the number of figures in the letter shows that Joyce was invested in proving his point: his reserves of money and time were so low that his very life, as he saw it, was interrupted. By his "interrupted life," Joyce meant his writing, which he made clear in a subsequent letter to Richards (March 13, 1906, *Letters* 178-180, qtd. below). This is a far cry from the litany of achievements – begetting a child, learning German and Danish, writing 500 pages and so on – that he wrote home to Stanislaus two weeks before Giorgio's arrival. The "intolerable (to me) duties of my position" expanded to fill all of Joyce's life, as he saw it, overrunning his family life and disrupting his writerly life. He seems not to even have had the heart to swindle any tailors. On 13 March 1906, he wrote about the subject to Richards again:

> You suggest that I should write a novel in some sense autobiographical. I have already written nearly a thousand pages of such a novel, as I think I told you, 914 pages to be accurate. I calculate that these twenty-five chapters, about half the book, run to 150,000 words. But it is quite impossible for me in present

[17] On June 7, 1905, Joyce wrote Stanislaus that he had finished the twenty-fourth chapter of *Stephen Hero*. It is likely that he finished the twenty-fifth and what exists of the twenty-sixth – all that exists of *Stephen Hero* – before his son was born on 27 July 1905.

> circumstances to think the rest of the book, much less to write it. (*Letters* 131-132)

Once again, Joyce carefully lays out the figures as though the precise number of manuscript pages mattered. We can be sure that if Joyce lays out a litany, it is important; if he lays out an account, it is painfully important. Joyce found his inability to write excruciating. He had complained about money and the conditions under which he wrote before, but here, snappishness coalesced into something more intense; the complaints emanated from a deep frustration over the difficulties of balancing his financial needs and money-making responsibilities with his needs as a writer. Joyce was now not only frustrated, but stalled.

None of this was solely the result of Giorgio's birth, but the event provides a neat marker for the end of Joyce's work on *Stephen Hero* and for his two-year writing hiatus. He himself saw Giorgio's birth as wrapped up with his financial and writing life: "Before he was born I had no fear of fortune," he wrote in a notebook of jottings for the final version of *Portrait* (*Workshop* 98).[18] But the changes, although they disrupted Joyce's writerly production, also had positive ramifications for his life and work; just as the pressure on him was most intolerable, the results of his hard work and major life changes were beginning to pay off. On April 4, 1905, four months before Giorgio was born, Joyce wrote to Stanislaus, "I have now finished another chapter and am at chapter XX. This is a terrible opus: I wonder how I have the patience to write it. Do you think other people will have the patience to read it?" (*Letters* 87). Significantly, the chapter that Joyce had just completed centers on Stephen's aesthetic theory. A couple of months

later, on May 27, 1905, Joyce wrote to Stanislaus, "I have changed the scope of the novel very much and intend to rewrite some of the beginning, which, I think is not well written" (*Letters* 90). Even before Giorgio was born, even before things came to a head, Joyce began to have doubts about the massive endeavor and began figuring out how to rewrite it.

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After Giorgio was born, with no further progress on the novel and no sign that the money and time pressures would let up, Joyce attempted a geographic cure: he took a job as a correspondence clerk in a bank in Rome (Ellmann 231) and arrived there on 31 July 1906 (*Letters* 144). The move to Rome was catalyzed by events at the Berlitz school: the subdirector had embezzled some money and left the school in a tight spot (Ellmann 231). But Joyce's writer's block set the scene for the move, as did a strong pull towards stability. Joyce wanted to hold down a "real" job, now that his son was a concern, and he wanted to earn enough money to make a writing career a more real possibility. Joyce took fatherhood seriously, even centering *Ulysses* around the search for it. Rome was Joyce's attempt to be normal in order to be a good father.

Ellmann writes that Joyce was troubled by stability in Trieste and took the job mainly because he "throve on flurry" and felt "at check in Trieste" (*232,* 231). Work on *Stephen Hero* halted, according to Ellmann, because it was hard to concentrate on that book while the arrangements for publishing *Dubliners* were up in the air: "[t]he sense of being at check in Trieste deepened and made that city intolerable" (231). Joyce,

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[18] The so-called "Trieste Notebook," which Scholes and Kain write "postdates the completion of *Stephen Hero*. Most of the entries in it seem to have been made between 1907, when *Stephen Hero* was abandoned,

according to Ellmann, could not get by without disrupting the stability of his own life and home, not least by his drinking habits. But painting Joyce's character in such firm lines at such an early age and at the beginning of his career begs the question. Ellmann also misses the larger picture in focusing on Joyce's troubles with the publication of *Dubliners*.[19] The pressures on Joyce were too real to dismiss so easily or to write off as a publishing problem, especially given that Joyce had not yet published a full-length work and so can not have had the same expectations of publishers as an older Joyce might. It is also too coincidental that Joyce's halting work on *Stephen Hero* coincided so neatly with Giorgio's birth. If Joyce throve on flurry, he need not have left Trieste. The additional "flurry" provided by the move to Rome did not help Joyce to thrive: he wrote very little in Rome. Joyce was trying to escape from the flurry because he *valued* stability, at least in his writing life.

Indeed, most of the published letters from this period focus on Joyce's and Nora's attempts to establish security.[20] The bank in Rome paid Joyce by the month and would not let him borrow against his future pay as freely as his supervisors at the Berlitz school had. Joyce used Stanislaus, still in Trieste, as a kind of bank, asking him for money that he would wire back at the end of the month, and sending him extra money at the beginning of the month to build his balance up. This puts the lie to the idea that Joyce was merely a sponger: What the letters show is an extended family still operating as an economic collective. Joyce did continue to take more than he wanted to from Stanislaus, but continued to believe that eventually, this would not be necessary and often expressed the sentiment that "this month must be the last of this wretched embarrassment" (October

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and 1909" (*Workshop* 92).

[19] Ira B. Nadel, in "Joyce and Blackmail," discusses some problems with Ellmann's biography of Joyce.

12 1906, *Letters* 178). He and Nora tried other ways to budget and conserve, with little success. But Joyce's needs were very real and very pressing. In fact, he was poor enough that he wrote, in a letter to Stanislaus, "There are two great patches in the seat of my trousers so that I cannot leave off my coat in the office and sit stewing for hours," "on an uncushioned, straw-bottomed chair . . . . I . . . have to wear my tail coat constantly" (31 August and 6 Sept., *Letters* 153 and 156). "It is a good thing the salaam has gone out of fashion here" (?12 Sept, 1906, *Letters* 159). Joyce took on pupils as a way to earn enough money to live on (*Letters* 195). This left him no time for writing, and it is worth noting that although Stanislaus complained about how much Joyce borrowed, he objected to Joyce's putting his economic needs above his writing, as evidenced by Joyce's reply to him: "Why do you disapprove of my taking another pupil—if I can get one? My leisure is of little use to me and I want money. You cannot imagine I want to continue writing at present. I have written quite enough and before I do any more in that line I must see some reason why [his work must be published]—I am not a literary Jesus Christ" (18[-20] September 1906, *Letters* 162). Joyce, however, still saw his economic position as deeply intertwined with his writing career.

While Joyce was, at first, willing to put his writing on hold while he tried to stabilize his financial life – even believing that doing so was a way to protect his writing[21] – he soon realized that economic problems were not the only ones he had.

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[20] Joyce's letters from his nine months in Rome can be found in *Letters* 144-220.

[21] As pressing as material concerns were, Joyce was not about to become a hack. He wrote to Grant Richards, while negotiating over the publication of *Dubliners*, "It is true that I stand in need of a publisher, but the publisher I need must at least be prepared to risk something for what he esteems highly and in the meantime I am glad that my position, modest though it be, enables me to save my work from mutilation and my talent from corruption" (13 Oct 1906, *Letters* 179). This is an interesting take on his job—as saving his talent by saving him from prostituting it, essentially. That Joyce thought his talent could be prostituted tells us that whatever was sacred to him about his art was still unscathed, even though his aesthetics had fallen by the wayside.

Joyce was troubled by intense and terrible dreams at this time, enough to inquire of Stanislaus, “Can you tell me what is a cure for dreaming? I am troubled every night by horrible and terrifying dreams: death, corpses, assassinations in which I take an unpleasantly prominent part” (19 Aug 1906, *Letters* 151). Joyce’s psyche was energetically dealing with the changes he was going through, and it was not long until the problems his psyche was dealing with began to surface in his conscious life. The problems he eventually identified were those that made his art and his life sacred, to his mind. As he wrote to Stanislaus on October 18, 1906, less than three months after he moved to Rome:

> It is impossible for me to write anything in my present circumstances. I wrote some notes for *A Painful Case* but I hardly think the subject is worth treating at much length. The fact is, my imagination is starved at present. I went through my entire book of verses mentally . . . and they nearly all seemed to me poor and trivial: some phrases and lines pleased me and no more. A page of *A Little Cloud* gives me no more pleasure than all my verses. I am glad the verses are to be published because they are a record of my past but I regret that years are going over and that I cannot follow the road of speculation which often opens before me. (*Letters* 182)

What is important to Joyce about writing has little to do with its formal or aesthetic qualities. It goes beyond “phrases and lines,” and so in a way does not have much to do with his epiphanies. It has nothing to do with *quidditas*, *consonantia*, or *claritas*, nothing to do with the lyric, epic, or dramatic. And it is not particularly interested in distinguishing pity from terror or static from kinetic, nor in delineating what a tragic

emotion is. What is important to Joyce about writing is "imagination," and being able to follow "the road of speculation." What is important to him is being spiritually engaged. As he wrote more fully to Stanislaus on 16 February 1907, "For my part I have one life. I have felt it slipping from me 'like water from a muslin bag.' . . . I fear that my spiritual barque is on the rocks. . . . I would like to go back to Trieste because I remember some nights walking along the streets in the summer and thinking over some of the phrases in my stories" (16 Feb 1907, *Letters* 215).[22]

Joyce was ashamed of his failure in Rome and spoke of having "made a *coglioneria*" and of himself as "*coglionato*": "a ball-up" and "balled up," respectively, as Ellmann translates them (16 February 1907, *Letters* 215). Despite his shame, Joyce felt he needed to prioritize his writing again, and he was willing to do so even though he did not know what job he would be able to take when he arrived in Trieste. He wrote that Artifoni had guaranteed him, before he left for Rome, a place at the Berlitz school in Trieste if he were to return, but rather calmly added "Could I not return to Trieste and give private lessons?" Joyce knew only that he needed to get out of Rome and back to a place where he could be with people who understood him. Underneath the decision to move, however, was a decision to put his financial career behind his writerly one. He realized that taking his husbandly and fatherly duties so seriously was directly related to the spiritual problem, for directly after he claimed that his "spiritual boat [was] on the rocks," he wrote, "There is some element of sanity in this last mad performance of mine,

[22] Joyce found dialogue with like-minded souls important to his writing. Stanislaus was, as this point, probably his best and most important interlocutor. Joyceans are fond of reminding us that Stanislaus was Joyce's "whetstone," but no one has really plumbed the depths of Stanislaus's contribution, although one critic has mentioned that Stanislaus was probably more instrumental in inspiring Joyce's stream-of-consciousness style than Dujardin was. In a way, the dialogue with Lynch in *A Portrait* is a kind of homage to Stanislaus, and dialogue itself is held up as more important than theories of aesthetics in

I am sure. I feel somehow that I am what Pappie said I wasn't [:] a gentleman" – in other words, he stood by his family (16 Feb 1907, *Letters* 215). "What really is the point," he wrote to Stanislaus in October, "[is] whether it is possible for me to combine the exercise of my art with a reasonably happy life" (Oct. 18 1906, *Letters* 182). Only after much suffering did Joyce realize that one way or another, his choices required sacrifices; "combining" without paring down was impossible. It took a spiritual crisis, one deeply intertwined with his creative and writerly self, to prompt Joyce to make some difficult choices about both how his financial and writing life fit together and how his aesthetics and his art fit together as well.

Joyce continued to crystallize his understanding of how all of these elements related to each other, and by the beginning of March, wrote rather eloquently to Stanislaus,

> I have come to the conclusion that it is about time I made up my mind whether I am to become a writer or a patient Cousins. I foresee that I shall have to do other work as well but to continue as I am at present would certainly mean my mental extinction. It is months since I have written a line and even reading tires me. The interest I took in socialism and the rest has left me. I have gradually slid down until I have ceased to take any interest in any subject. I look at God and his theatre through the eyes of my fellow-clerks so that nothing surprises, moves, excites or disgusts me. Nothing of my former mind seems to have remained except a heightened emotiveness which satisfies itself in the sixty-miles-an-hour pathos of some cinematograph or before some crude Italian gazette-picture. Yet I

generating art. Unfortunately, I have not the room to detail Stanislaus's contribution here, but the subject is in great need of exploration.

> have certain ideas I would like to give form to: not as a doctrine but as the continuation of the expression of myself which I now see I began in *Chamber Music*. These ideas or instincts or intuitions may be purely personal. I have no wish to codify myself as anarchist or socialist or reactionary (?1 March 1907 to Stanislaus, *Letters* 217-220).

The tone of the letter shows a calm yet saddened acceptance. Joyce was spiritually exhausted. The need to provide for his family took his writing away from him; what was left was the memory of what writing was like and what it meant to him. Rome was a kind of crucible for Joyce: In it, he forged his path through early adulthood and his way as an artist; any impurities burned off. Aesthetics was one of those impurities – he no longer had any desire to codify literature or cast his ideas into doctrines. He was answering the call of his vocation, seeing it not in terms of his Jesuit schooling but in terms of creating. Rome brought him to the end of his own *bildungsroman* and allowed him to begin his *künstlerroman*. In the preceding years, he realized that supporting his family was important to him; now, he realized not only that writing, and spiritual and intellectual engagements in general, were equally important, but also that some aspects of writing were not – they were only distractions and wastes of precious time. Joyce dropped doctrines, codifications, and theories of aesthetics as encumbrances.[23] This would play out in the way he wrote and treated his epigraphic character – with a "pitiful compassion" as part of his past that differed from his present (S. Joyce, *Recollections* 26). Finally, Joyce gave notice at his new job. He wrote twice to Stanislaus on 16 February: "I have no 'carriera' before me in commerce. Not because I can't make one, but because

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[23] See ?1 March 1907 letter quoted on previous page.

I won't." (pm 16 Feb. 1905, *Letters* 214-215). Joyce decided to make writing his "carriera." He resigned as of March 5 and was back in Trieste on 7 March 1907.

A number of things came together for Joyce in the chaos of moving from Rome back to Trieste. He finally saw his long-cherished dream of being published come true as he exchanged proofs of *Chamber Music* with the publisher Elkin Mathews. He also arranged to publish, in a local Triestine paper, a short series of articles, which he then managed to parlay into a short series of lectures. He fell ill shortly thereafter; his daughter Lucia was born while he was in the hospital, and he wrote 'The Dead' while he recovered (Joyce, *Letters* 64). He taught for a time at the Berlitz school, but before long gave that up to give private lessons, which provided more time and more liberty. Most importantly, he once again began to work with momentum on *Stephen Hero*, this time turning it into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. According to Ellmann, he had composed the first three chapters of *A Portrait* between September 1907 and early April 1908 (274). Joyce was managing to live differently, finding ways to make enough money to get by and finding enough leisure to feed his soul and imagination to write. This way of life eventually gave way to Joyce's famous inurement to his family's discomfort with financial precariousness, but this inurement came only after he attempted to be "a gentleman," despite what "Pappie thought."

Joyce's experiences between 1904 and 1907 changed him enough to change *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. As a father, Joyce gained a new perspective on childhood. His letters to Stanislaus from Rome are sprinkled with updates about Giorgio's development, and his fascination with Giorgio's development

must have been invaluable to his conception of *Portrait*'s opening passages.[24] But being a father also gave him an appreciation for the importance of the physical. And the demands breadwinning placed on his time forced him to prioritize and thus forced him to abandon his aesthetic theory.

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In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which is much more economical, brighter, punchier, and more artistically rendered than *Stephen Hero*'s long explanations and rather tired prose, our hero's aesthetic views are relatively compressed. Rather than scattering them about as in *Stephen Hero*, in *A Portrait,* Joyce presents the aesthetic pronouncements *en media res* – Lynch and Stephen are resuming a previous conversation – and as half of a fictional conversation. This provides some very handy gaps; Joyce did not need to present anything he did not want to. This theory is also replete with interruptions, the best of which are by Stephen's interlocutor Lynch, and are of a very particular kind. In this way, Joyce distances Stephen's remarks from himself, undercutting them, but not completely – mitigating them but not negating them. Stephen's efforts to focus the conversation on aesthetic philosophy are encumbered before they even start:

> —But you have not answered my question, said Lynch. What is art? What is the beauty it expresses?
>
> —That was the first definition I gave you, you sleepy-headed wretch, said Stephen, when I began to try to think out the matter for myself. Do you

[24] Ellmann, in his biography, says that Lucia's birth was one of the main inspirations, but Giorgio must have had even more of an impact, since he, and not Lucia, would have been talking as Joyce wrote the first

> remember the night? Cranly lost his temper and began to talk about Wicklow bacon.
>
> —I remember, said Lynch. He told us about them flaming fat devils of pigs.
>
> —Art, said Stephen, is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an esthetic end. You remember the pigs and forget that. You are a distressing pair, you and Cranly. (207)

Stephen is dogged by the fact that the last conversation on aesthetics was itself interrupted by the "distressing pair" of Lynch and Cranly, their tempers, and their appetites. These physical realities trump logical discussions and literature itself. And the concrete is much more compelling than the abstract, especially when we are tired and hungry. Joyce may well have been hungry when he wrote this. Pigs, in other words, are much more compelling than theories.[25] The concrete, this passage suggests, is where creation begins: Cranly tires, loses his temper, talks about Wicklow bacon, and this intrusion of reality into their conversation prompts the playful representation of the subject matter *pigs*. Not simply Wicklow bacon, they are, in Lynch's telling, "flaming fat devils of pigs." They have become objects of artistic exaggeration. They, and not Stephen's aesthetic theory, are the seed which germinates art.

Stephen himself appreciates this verbal play, this intrusion of reality into his discourse:

> —Damn your yellow insolence, answered Lynch.
>
> This second proof of Lynch's culture made Stephen smile again.

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chapter (307).

[25] Earlier in the same chapter, Stephen thinks of "the shrewd northern face of the rector who had taught him to construe the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid in a courtly English, made whimsical by the mention of porkers

> —It was a great day for European culture, he said, when you made up your mind to swear in yellow. (204)

There is no logical reason for Lynch to "swear in yellow" – in fact, that is exactly what Stephen likes about it: its whimsy, and the vibrancy that whimsy provides, the same whimsy that produced "them flaming fat devils of pigs." This is what Joyce realized, in Rome, was most important to him about art: imagination. Joyce knew, after wondering whether anyone would read *Stephen Hero* and tiring of it himself, that if his aesthetic theory were to play a role in the new version of the novel, it needed some vibrancy and interruptions. It needed plot and character. In fact, the entire conversation on aesthetics begins with such playfulness and with Stephen's addressing such physical realities:

> [Stephen] plucked him by the sleeve to come away. . . . At the foot of the steps they halted and Stephen took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and offered it to his companion.
>
> —I know you are poor, he said. (204)

Poverty haunts much of the novel, but its meaning in this episode is particular, as it is always in relation to aesthetics. It takes on particular significance in light of Joyce's struggles to balance providing for his family with his need to write. Stanislaus Joyce wrote about the relation between poverty and philosophical discussions as a hallmark of the Irish novel; his comments shed light on how the fiction of the aesthetic theory episode drastically changes the content of the theory itself:

> When an English writer – Wells or Galsworthy or Huxley or Aldington – deals with social, religious, or intellectual problems, one has the impression that even

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and potsherds and chines of bacon" (179). He also tells Davin that "Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow" (203). Pigs are a recurring theme in the chapter, twice linked with literary concerns and whimsy.

> though the problems are real and the writer is striving to be sincere, the life that produced him is in general stable and balanced. It has been lived for centuries against a Constable background. And if he poses as an extremist, it is mainly a picturesque attitude like Count Tolstoy's donning of his Russian smock-frock, over trousers cut by the most expensive tailor in Petersburg, to play at being a peasant saint. The characters whom these writers create to voice conflicts of opinions are people of ease and culture. They discuss problems instead of playing golf. It does them great honour that they prefer dialectic to golf, but those pastimes are both on the same level of importance. Their brilliant chatter gives the impression of purely academic after-dinner discussions. In Ireland, on the other hand, the dinner itself is often lacking, and in consequence the discussions assume a different tone. The bread-and-butter test is not irrelevant. For my brother life was not an interesting subject for discussion; it was a passion. (*MBK* 185-186).

For Joyce, the bread-and-butter test might well be called the cigarette test. Family, food, and the reality represented by fiction always had a better place at the table than philosophizing or theories about fiction. The conversation on aesthetics begins, for Joyce, with playful banter, poverty and cigarettes and can only really happen with an earthy interlocutor, whose "laugh, pitched in a high key and coming from so muscular a frame, seemed like the whinny of an elephant," whose "body shook all over," and who, "to ease his mirth . . . rubbed both his hands delightedly, over his groins" (201). Joyce's fictional choices here are at least as important as Stephen's aesthetics: we must remember that Lynch is Joyce's character as well, and his mirth and sexuality contextualize and

flesh out the aesthetics. Both Stephen and Lynch, both the philosophy and the fiction, comprise Joyce's aesthetics. The two counterbalance each other.

Because Joyce abandoned writing his own aesthetics, and because he has placed Stephen's in this earthy context, we should be wary of too easily accepting Stephen's ideas in his first aesthetic pronouncement in the episode, which defines the "esthetic emotion" and "improper" or "kinetic" art. The idea hinges on our accepting that good art combines both pity and terror, which deal with "whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites [the feeling that arises] with the human sufferer," in the case of pity, and "with the secret cause" in the case of terror (204). But though Stephen speaks of feelings' being united with sufferers and causes, the combination of pity and terror is supposed to render the aesthetic emotion static and somehow cleaner than those "feelings excited by improper art," which are "desire or loathing," and which Stephen dislikes because they "urge us to possess, to go toward something" or "to abandon, to go from something": essentially, because they move us (205). Lynch counters this diatribe with his memory of being moved to write his "name in pencil on the backside of the Venus of Praxiteles in the Museum" (205), pitting what is clearly proper art against the desire it awoke in him. Stephen counters this by outlawing Lynch as a valid example: "I speak of normal natures," he says. "You also told me that when you were a boy in that charming carmelite school you ate pieces of dried cowdung" (205). But rather than this serving as an adequate counter, for Joyce, it grounds us in the most earthy element of all, and in doing so unites us with soul: Lynch laughs at Stephen's response, rubs his groin again, and is humbled under Stephen's withering gaze – and Stephen then sees Lynch anew: "The long slender flattened skull beneath the long pointed cap brought before

Stephen's mind the image of a hooded reptile. The eyes, too, were reptilelike in glint and gaze. Yet at that instant, humbled and alert in their look, they were lit by one tiny human point, the window of a shrivelled soul, poignant and selfembittered" (206). Stephen continues to focus on Lynch's animality and to overlook the flash of soul that he sees; he discounts the connection between the two, missing that animality makes Lynch's soul visible, and tries to steer them back to "a mental world" (260). But Joyce does not miss it: Joyce writes this into the episode and thus into his own aesthetic theory. Joyce continually shows how soul and creativity are deeply tied to the physical. Stephen continually overlooks this, even though it continually presents itself during his conversation with Lynch.

Because Stephen overlooks the physical and animalistic, they trip him up. When Lynch asks him what beauty is, he finds it difficult to respond: "They had reached the canal bridge and, turning from their course, went on by the trees. A crude grey light, mirrored in the sluggish water, and a smell of wet branches over their heads seemed to war against the course of Stephen's thoughts" (207). Walking through the world is distracting to Stephen here. His attention is drawn to his physical environment – branches, water, light. If he could abstract himself from the world to better concentrate, he probably would. Interestingly, for Joyce, walking was conducive to imaginative thought[26]; in other instances, we see Stephen mirroring this conjunction of thinking and walking, notably in the beginning of chapter three ("Proteus") of *Ulysses* and at the beginning of chapter five of *A Portrait*. As he leaves his chaotic home for school,

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[26] Stanislaus Joyce wrote, "My talks with my brother were so interminable that almost every other evening I used to accompany him across the city to the National Library, and then turn back home to begin my own homework" (*MBK* 103), and Joyce wrote to Stanislaus, from Rome, "I would like to go back to Trieste

walking through the city calms him: "as he walked down the avenue and felt the grey morning light falling about him through the dripping trees and smelt the strange wild smell of the wet leaves and bark, his soul was loosed of her miseries" (176). It is a few hours before his walk with Lynch, and yet the grey light and the smell of wet trees is the same; only Stephen's perception of them differs. In the first instance, the light falls about him, the wet trees smell "strange" and "wild," and his soul is freed; in the second, the light is "crude," the adjective "sluggish" takes a central place, and the smell of wet trees encumbers him. In the first instance, Stephen escapes from his home, abstracting himself into an environment that aids thought. In the second instance, Stephen tries to cut himself off from the physical world altogether, and that inhibits his thought. This is another reason to be wary of Stephen's theory: Joyce undermines the idea of aesthetic stasis by countering it not only with Lynch's abnormal nature but also with Stephen's own relationship to the world around him. Although it would be a grave error to take the trees, water and light as art *per se*, Joyce implies in the comparison between Stephen's theory of idealized relations of audience to art and his own troubled relationship to the world around him that stasis is neither a realistic nor desirable artistic goal, the abstraction it represents conducive neither to aesthetic perception nor to accurate philosophical thought. He implies that the bread and butter test is relevant – that a theory must gibe with reality, or an aesthetic theory much gibe with art or fiction, to be of value.

When Stephen tries to continue his definition of beauty, Lynch interrupts him, saying "If I am to listen to your esthetic philosophy give me at least another cigarette. I don't care about it. I don't even care about women. Damn you and damn everything. I

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because I remember some nights walking along the streets in the summer and thinking over some of the phrases in my stories" (16 Feb 1907, *Letters* 215).

want a job of five hundred a year. You can't get me one" (207). This matches Joyce's own sentiments during the years he worked on *Portrait*, and especially during the years in Rome, when he wrote to Stanislaus: "Why do you disapprove of my taking another pupil—if I can get one? My leisure is of little use to me and I want money. You cannot imagine I want to continue writing at present. I have written quite enough and before I do any more in that line I must see some reason why—I am not a literary Jesus Christ." (18[-20] September 1906, *Letters* 162). "Some reason why," in Joyce's mind at the time, meant publication and the money that came with it. Lynch, as Joyce, understands that earthly needs must be met first, before more abstract matters can be focused on. Both are unlike Stephen, who thinks he can and should shut the world out in order to create his aesthetics. Oddly enough, Stephen trumps the abstract with the physical when Donovan, "a member of the field club" (210) whom Stephen finds irrelevant, interrupts him and Lynch: "Bring us a few turnips and onions next time you go out, said Stephen drily, to make a stew" (211). "We are all highly respectable people in the field club," Donovan replies, implying that the study of plants might be less respectable if one were to eat them as well. We must remember that Joyce may himself have been hungry when he wrote this.

When Donovan leaves and Stephen can return to his aesthetic theory, the flow of the conversation changes, and the dialogue becomes much more Socratic. Stephen takes two pages to explicate *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*, and Lynch speaks only to register the brilliance of Stephen's ideas: "I see it," "Bull's eye! . . . Go on," and "Bull's eye again! . . . Tell me now what is claritas and you win the cigar" (212).[27] The shape of the aesthetic theory differs here: the interruptions are less interruptive and function more

as brief pauses; readers can keep track of the ideas; the writing coheres around the theory, and plot and character fall to the background. In the rest of the aesthetic theory episode, the reverse is true. Joyce constructed this section in such a way that readers are more likely to absorb these ideas and take them seriously. This suggests that these ideas align more closely with Joyce's own; Bakhtin would say they are less refracted.[28] Bakhtin says that "The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of his epoch" (300). For the aesthetic theory passage of *Portrait*, this means that all the different kinds of speech involved, from Lynch's "swearing in yellow" to Stephen's "scholastic stink," from the comedic banter of the beginning of the theory to the Socratic dialogue and essayistic forms of the *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* section, create a structure that, if read carefully, tells us what Joyce meant. This is not an exact science, of course. But paying attention to how form, content and tone all interact to create something larger than themselves is crucial if we are to understand the novel at all.

One thing that makes this difficult in the case of *Portrait* is that the ideas in the aesthetic theory were, at one time, Joyce's own, "workshop pieces" as Scholes and Kain call them, taken whole cloth out of Joyce's Paris and Pola Notebooks, among other places. But these "workshops pieces" themselves became refracted to different degrees; as Joyce grew, his thoughts changed, sometimes drastically and sometimes in more nuanced ways, so that the words and ideas Joyce took quite seriously at one point became

[27] I have omitted only narrator's phrases in the ellipses here (i.e., "said Lynch").
[28] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 298-300.

their own language, one distinct strand of heteroglossia[29] that Joyce deploys, like the other kinds of speech, to create that Bakhtinian structure in which his "intention" (Bakhtin 300), or the novel's most accurate meaning, resides. Any criticism that holds Joyce to the ideas he expressed in juvenilia, without considering how his attitude toward them may have evolved, is anachronistic at best. Joyce, in the aesthetic theory section of *Portrait,* holds a conversation with his younger self through the medium of fiction.[30] Only through reading the Bakhtinian structure of the episode can we understand the terms of that conversation. To the extent that these ideas and words are not refracted – to the extent that they match what Joyce thought and believed as he composed the final *Portrait*, and to the extent that he employed them in writing the final *Portrait* – the aesthetic theory section of the novel is a guide to the novel as a whole. Regardless of how refracted these ideas are, however, the Bakhtinian structure of the aesthetic theory section is in conversation with the novel as a whole. Such conversation distinguishes the epigraphic novel from other kinds of fiction. Whether that conversation is characterized by argument or agreement depends on the degree of refraction.

The ideas Stephen presents on *integritas*, *consonantia* and *claritas* are less refracted than others. Joyce buries his architectonic plan in the second of these three qualities, rhythm – the same idea that begins the original "Portrait" and that corresponds to the rhythmic structure, the rise and fall that has become a critical truism about *Portrait*. It does not guide the novel as an initial statement would have; rather, it explicates it in

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[29] See Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel," 294-296, for a discussion of what constitutes an individual language.

[30] Beckett made a similar dynamic clear in his "Krapp's Last Tape," in which Krapp listens to and interacts with his own tape-recorded "journal entries" from years and decades past. The interaction is rather one-sided, of course – something like yelling at the television during a sports game, or warning a character in a horror film not to open the door. But it unfolds, for the audience, the same way any dialogue would.

hindsight. It is also, however, enacted by Stephen early on, there for those who are apt enough to quickly spot the relevant part of the aesthetic theory based on what their experience of reading the novel has told them:

> When would he be like the fellows in poetry and rhetoric? They had big voices and big boots and they studied trigonometry. That was very far away. First came the vacation and then the next term and then vacation again and then again another term and then again the vacation. It was like a train going in and out of tunnels and that was like the noise of the boys eating in the refectory when you opened and closed the flaps of the ears. Term, vacation; tunnel, out; noise, stop. (17)

Stephen thinks this about growing up, and so in a way, this theory *is* laid out for the reader early on, and does "guide" the novel. At the very least, this passage should, combined with the structure and style of the novel, make the reader more apt to notice the section on rhythm in the aesthetic theory as a kind of explication of certain aspects of the novel. It also matches closely in spirit what Joyce wrote at the beginning of his first "Portrait":

> the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only. Our world . . . is, for the most part, estranged from those of its members who seek . . . to liberate from the personalized lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts. But for such as these a portrait is not an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion. (257-258)

Growing up, Stephen tells us, is a repetitive and rhythmic process. It involves more than term, vacation, and even more than the sexual rhythm implied by the train metaphor, but it is essentially like them, especially as presented in this portrait. This idea, indeed, governs the whole book well enough that it justifies Joyce's reuse of the title.

Integritas and *claritas* seem less immediately applicable to *Portrait*. With *integritas*, as with *consonantia*, an experience in Stephen's childhood matches the concept. Stephen says of *integritas*, using the example of a basket:

> In order to see that basket . . . your mind first of all separates the basket from the rest of the visible universe which is not the basket. The first phase of apprehension is a bounding line drawn about the object to be apprehended. . . . temporal or spatial, the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it. You apprehend it as *one* thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*. (212)

This seems a rather basic definition of unity. *Integritas*, it seems, should involve a little more than this. But the idea does match what Stephen thinks as a youth about the universe, when he lists his name and extended "address," from "*Class of Elements*" to "*The Universe*" in "the flyleaf of the geography":

> What was after the universe? Nothing. But was there anything round the universe to show where it stopped before the nothing place began? It could not be a wall but there could be a thin thin line there all round everything. It was very big to think of everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be but he could think only of God. (15-16)

The bounding line makes it into Stephen's aesthetic theory as *integritas*. What does not make it into the theory is God. *Integritas*, as Stephen defines it, may come into play in terms of Joyce's final choice of focus in the final *Portrait*: rather than discussing all of the characters in depth, *Portrait* focuses exclusively on Stephen, and achieves a tighter unity and more compelling vision in doing so. But this is an aesthetic decision on Joyce's part that most readers are not aware of; before *Stephen Hero* came to light, and before a huge body of criticism grew up around the novel, only a handful of readers could possibly have been aware of it. Its use as an epigraphic utterance is therefore quite limited. It does, however, hint at Stephen's own disconnection from the world, his own abstraction into a mental world, and his own withdrawal from God. Stephen is drawing a line around himself, and doing what "Only God could do." To the extent that this represents a withdrawal from divinity, and a move towards abstraction, Joyce would himself have seen it as shortsighted at best, given the importance he found in worldly and spiritual matters. Joyce, however, would have understood this as a stage in Stephen's development and as part of his break from the church. For Joyce, who may have held the idea himself at one point, divinity and the material world would reenter his aesthetics, though Catholicism proper would not.[31]

Stephen writes God out of his aesthetics even more clearly in his discussion of *claritas*, which he recasts as *quidditas*. Stephen tells his companion that

> The connotation of the word [*claritas*] . . . is rather vague. Aquinas uses a term which seems to be inexact. It baffled me for a long time. It would lead you to believe that he had in mind symbolism or idealism, the supreme quality of beauty being a light from some other world, the idea of which the matter is but the

[31] The idea does not show up in the Paris Notebook or Pola Notebook.

> shadow, the reality of which is but the symbol. I thought he might mean that *claritas* is the artistic discovery of the divine purpose in anything or a force of generalisation which would make the esthetic image a universal one, make it outshine its proper conditions. But that is literary talk. I understand it so. (213)

Here, Stephen seems to reject abstraction into a purely mental world, dismissing it, interestingly, as "literary talk." Essentially, he dismisses incarnation, both the religious doctrine and the general principle. He rejects what he portrays as a cheapening of the material world; tellingly, he emphasizes not the "light from some other world" or "the divine purpose" or even the "force of generalisation," all of which become vague as he recasts them: Each of these terms represents the same thing in Stephen's mind; each is a possibility that Stephen does not believe in strongly or afford much of its own attention – each takes the place of the others without any respect for its particular meaning. Stephen highlights instead, by casting them into parallel form and placing them periodically, "but the shadow," "but the symbol." Stephen emphasizes physical reality and finds a cold materialism to be the "proper condition" of things. He strips *claritas* from anything related to divinity and turns it into an entirely materialist concept.

This quibble over *claritas* is exactly where Joyce makes the choice not to include the theory of aesthetic epiphany. In *Stephen Hero*, Stephen says that when "the mind . . . discovers the third quality," *claritas* or *quidditas*, "This is the moment which I call epiphany" (213). Joyce deliberately does not include his idea of epiphany; in fact, he never published it himself. He also makes a point of leaving out the word *soul* from his definition of claritas or quidditas; in *Stephen Hero*, Stephen equates soul with *quidditas* or "whatness": "Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance.

The soul of the commonest object, the structure [*consonantia*, rhythm] of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany" (213). It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to tell what Joyce meant by leaving out the concept of epiphany and the word *soul*, but the choice is significant, and was obviously deliberate. It squares with Joyce's experiences during the ten year composition of *Portrait*, when material needs weighed so heavily on him. But it does not quite square with his realization during the same period that his "spiritual barque" depended on his having leisure to write and read. It may be that these understandings, or the importance of both material and spiritual needs, had not fully coalesced in Joyce's psyche. It may be that Joyce meant to represent something specifically about Stephen as distinct from himself, or about a stage in his own or another's life. Or it may simply be that he felt the need to further distance himself from the Church, and that words like *epiphany* and *soul* would have invited readers to jump to the wrong conclusions. Joyce chooses to focus on the artist and on the more earthy idea of conception instead of focusing on the supernatural or divine, and he risks a somewhat purple passage about artistic conception being "like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani . . . called the enchantment of the heart" (213). Perhaps, in the end, the only thing that is clear is that Joyce's aesthetic theory is deeply entwined with materialism, abstraction, soul, and the challenges inherent in incorporating all three, and that Joyce emphasized the importance of the material above the others.

After explaining *integritas, consonantia and claritas* to Lynch, "Stephen paused and . . . felt that his words had called up around them a thoughtenchanted silence" (213). The reader, likewise, feels a pause here; the section is over, and Joyce gives us a moment

to let the ideas sink in. Stephen then moves on to his theory of the "three forms" that "art necessarily divides itself into" (214) – lyric, epic, and dramatic art – which, though still part of his aesthetic theory, is distinct from his theory about the three things needed for beauty; neither depends on the other to make sense. This theory of art's three forms is not terribly helpful to the reader trying to understand *Portrait*: beyond deciding which form *Portrait* is and why, there is not much immediate practical use to this theory. When Stephen lays out his introduction to the three forms of art, Lynch replies, "That you told me a few nights ago . . . and we began the famous discussion" (214). The thoughtenchanted silence is officially over. We have been reminded of Lynch and Cranly's recalcitrance, of "them flaming fat devils of pigs," and of all of Lynch's earthiness.

Indeed, Stephen reminds us of the particulars of Lynch's earthiness when he recounts the questions about art's three forms in his notebook: "*Is a chair finely made tragic or comic? Is the portrait of Mona Lisa good if I desire to see it? Is the bust of Sir Philip Crampton lyrical, epical, or dramatic? Can excrement or a child or a louse be a work of art? If not, why not?*" (214). The portrait of Mona Lisa reminds us of the Venus of Praxiteles, whose posterior Lynch signed; the question about excrement reminds us that Lynch once "ate pieces of dried cowdung" (205). The other questions likewise indicate a change in tone. The question about the chair seems silly, and indeed, though Joyce himself did keep such a list of questions in the Paris notebook, the phrasing differs significantly. The question about the chair, for instance, appears thus in Joyce's notebook:

Question: *Are houses, clothes, furniture, etc., works of art?*

> Answer: Houses, clothes, furniture, etc., are not necessarily works of art. They are human dispositions of sensible matter. When they are so disposed for an aesthetic end they are works of art. (55)

Originally, the question was quite serious. By changing the focus from *aesthetic or practical* to *tragic or comic*, Joyce changes the nature of the inquiry entirely. The question about excrement, children, and lice, was also phrased differently in the Paris notebook, as "*Why are not excrements, children and lice works of art?*" Taking it as a given that they are not art makes all the difference in the world. And the bust of Sir Philip Crampton, a Dublin in-joke, does not make it into the Paris notebook.[32]

It is difficult to imagine that Joyce meant us to take the ideas of lyric, epic, and dramatic art very seriously. While he does allow Stephen nearly a page, uninterrupted, to explain the theory, he begins with the slapstick scholasticism of the questions in Stephen's notebook, and ends with "—What do you mean, Lynch asked surlily, by prating about beauty and the imagination in this miserable Godforsaken island? No wonder the artist retired within or behind his handiwork after having perpetrated this country" (215). It is also difficult to tell how seriously he means us to take Stephen's statement that "The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished" (215). Joyce values life and the material at least as much as the aesthetic. They are not in need of purification; the whole of *Ulysses* stands as testament to the idea that life need not be purified to be art. And we have already heard Stephen say that "When we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic

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[32] Chester Anderson notes that it "was laughed at by generations of Dubliners. William York Tindall named it the 'degenerate artichoke'" (536, n. 214.15).

reproduction I require a new terminology and a new personal experience" (209). Stephen tacks on this interpretation of his theory of the three forms of literature as an explanation of artistic creation, but the only actual explication of the concept is the single claim that "the mystery of esthetic . . . creation is accomplished." It takes some extreme mental gymnastics to turn these three kinds of literature into artistic conception, gestation, and reproduction, and the text itself does not support such speculation, especially because we are not treated to any mention of a "new personal experience."

This last section of the aesthetic theory begins with a tantalizing mention of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: "Lessing, said Stephen, should not have taken a group of statues to write of. The art, being inferior, does not present the forms I spoke of distinguished clearly one from another" (214). This amounts to a dismissal of Lessing purely on the grounds that his aesthetics do not match Stephen's. Interestingly, in *Ulysses*, Stephen thinks about Lessing's *Laocoön*, the book about "a group of statues," when he walks on Sandymount Strand at the beginning of chapter three, the "Proteus" chapter. If we compare Stephen's timeline to Joyce's, we find that Stephen thinks about Lessing in 1904, when Joyce began the *Portrait*. And Lessing's comparison of the arts of painting and writing encompass some of Joyce's main aesthetic concerns in *A Portrait*, including rhythm and composition; even the idea of a "portrait" in words, as Joyce so carefully wrought it, owes something to Lessing's consideration of the proper uses of literary and visual arts.

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In terms of fictional choices, we need to be aware of how the entire epigraphic episode is composed – not only of Lynch's interruptions, but also what comes before and after it. What comes before is Stephen's refusal to sign the petition for universal brotherhood and his discussion with Davin about the hypocrisy of his signing the petition while being involved with the Fenians. These are the kind of "codifications" of life that Joyce, at the end of his sojourn in Rome, desired to rid himself of, in favor of working on his art. The episode ends with Lynch's line "your beloved is here" (215). They have been theorizing about beauty, and the talk disintegrates at his beloved's appearance. The real once again trumps the theoretical. Furthermore, Stephen then thinks to himself, after thinking of Emma and feeling filled with bitterness, that "Lynch was right. His mind, emptied of theory and courage, lapsed back into a listless peace" (216). The episode ends at this scene, with Stephen's wondering "if he had judged her too harshly? If her life were as simple as a rosary of hours, her life simple and strange as a bird's life, gay in the morning, restless all day, tired at sundown? Her heart simple and wilful as a bird's heart?" (216). The next episode begins with his writing the villanelle to her. Here, once again, the real gives rise to art. But this also indicates another aspect of Joyce's aesthetics: a profound vacillation between debasement and exaltation. The bird imagery, the oscillation between Stephen's anger at Emma, and his doubts over the truth of his assessment are an important part of Joyce's own aesthetics.

It is unclear when Joyce finished drafting *A Portrait*. Ellmann notes that Joyce had written "to the end of the third chapter, between September 1907 and 7 April 1908. It is not certain when he finished the last two chapters" (*Letters* 234 n. 5), but Joyce had

certainly not finished *A Portrait* by 1909,[33] when he began exchanging an extraordinary series of letters with Nora – letters which are remarkable not only for their frank content, but also for the way they capture the complexity of Joyce's ideas about material reality, sexuality, and art, and so help us more fully understand Joyce's aesthetics. In late July, 1904, Joyce wrote to Nora Barnacle, his future wife, "It is strange from what muddy pools the angels call forth a spirit of beauty" (*Letters* 44). He was commenting on the lyrics of a song he sent her, about "Henry VIII—a brutal and lustful king." This is perhaps the first hint Joyce dropped about how he understood the intersection of sex, art, and violence. Joyce's own abhorrence of violence ensured that he always felt torn about his own sexual proclivities and ensured that they stayed rather close to the surface of his conscience.

When Joyce went to Dublin in 1909, his friend Vincent Cosgrave told him that, while Joyce was dating Nora in 1904, he too was dating her (*Selected* 157-160). This awoke in Joyce a vicious jealousy. The revelation was soon revealed as a taunt, though

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[33] On 10 August 1909, Joyce wrote from Dublin to his brother Stanislaus, "Send me by registered post the new version of my novel which Kettle wishes to see" (*Letters* 234), which makes it seem as though he had finished *Portrait*. But Joyce wrote to Nora, when he was in Dublin in 1912 trying to sort out problems with the publication of *Dubliners*, "I have passed a terribly exciting week over my book. Roberts spoke to me today of my novel, and asked me to finish it," and again in the same letter, "If only my book [*Dubliners*] is published then I will plunge into my novel and finish it." ([postmark 22 August 1912], *Letters* 310). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, then was not finished before 1912, and it's likely that Joyce had not yet drafted the aesthetics interchange, since it comes so late in the novel. In fact, we can only be sure that *Portrait* was finished by late January, 1915, since that's when Ezra Pound had chapters three, four, and five of the novel ([late January 1915] to Grant Richards, *Letters* 336). Pound had first written to him about his novel on 17-19 Jan 1914 (*Letters* 327-328), and did not mention its being incomplete, though Ellmann and Forrest Read both state that Joyce sent Pound only the first chapter then (Ellmann 361; Read 20). Since Joyce marks the finish date as 1914, probably Pound, and the possibility of publication, had everything to do with his finishing the novel despite *Dubliners*' not seeing the light of day yet: "The necessity of meeting deadlines for the *Egoist* installments of *A Portrait* spurred Joyce to try to finish that book" (Ellmann 364). Ellmann also tells us that "After the publication of the third chapter [of *A Portrait* in *The Egoist*] a hiatus occurred. This was officially attributed to the outbreak of war, but there is some reason to guess that Joyce . . . had not yet written the fourth and fifth chapters. Since he wished to appear more strictly faithful to his old promise of writing a novel in ten years . . . he did not admit later that the composition may, in fact, have overlapped into 1915" (365; see also Read 31). Ellmann does not tell us what the reason is; Read tells us that Joyce "was writing desultorily" (Read 2).

some critics speculate about whether it might have been true. As they made up, Joyce wrote to Nora,

> Give yourself to me, dearest, all, all when we meet. All that is holy, hidden from others, you must give to me freely. I wish to be lord of your body and soul.
>
> There is a letter which I dare not be the first to write and which yet I hope every day you may write to me. A letter for my eyes only. Perhaps you will write it to me and perhaps it will calm the anguish of my longing.
>
> What can come between us now? We have suffered and been tried. Every veil of shame or diffidence seems to have fallen from us. Will we not see in each other's eyes the hours and hours of happiness that are waiting for us?
>
> Adorn your body for me, dearest. Be beautiful and happy and loving and provoking, full of memories, full of cravings, when we meet. . . .
>
> My jealousy is still smouldering in my heart. Your love for me must be fierce and violent to make me forget *utterly*. (22 August 1909, *Letters* 239, *Selected* 163)

In essence, Joyce asked his wife to write him a dirty letter – to engage in a turn-of-the-century version of phone sex or cyber sex. The pain of their argument over Cosgrave gave rise to something entirely new in their relationship – a more complete baring of themselves to each other. For Joyce, the Cosgrave incident catalyzed this – it was the final event that cleared the way, that both "tried" them and tore "Every veil of shame or diffidence" from between them. But for Joyce, a newer, more intimate and raw sexual relationship with Nora was also now necessary to assure him of Nora's love, and cement their commitment to each other; not being married must have made his jealousy and

insecurity even stronger. Joyce also likely found the intense emotions the Cosgrave incident aroused not entirely distasteful, although he did feel conflicted about them.

The letters are more than merely explicit – they also reveal a deep sadomasochistic streak, as well as Joyce's "cloacal obsession," as H. G. Wells termed it (330). It is as though every aspect of human life that is normally repressed, Joyce wanted to bring to light and explore. In one of his more straightforward and unadorned statements, he wrote to Nora, "I wish you would smack me or flog me even. Not in play, dear, in earnest and on my naked flesh" (?13December 1909, *Selected* 188). Whether or not Joyce wanted this "in earnest" or practiced any of this is beside the point for literary criticism; what is the point is that this was part of the fantasy, part of the imaginative exercise, for Joyce, and that this imaginative exercise has close ties to his own aesthetic practices and the composition of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*

The sadomasochism revealed itself most fully in Joyce's fears about what Nora made of him, and in his own disgust with himself: On 2 September 1909, for instance, he wrote to Nora, "I am in a wretched state of confusion and weakness on account of doing what I told you. When I woke up this morning and remembered the letter I wrote you last night I felt disgusted with myself" (*Letters* 243, *Selected* 166). And on 2 December 1909, he wrote

> My darling I ought to begin by begging your pardon, perhaps, for the extraordinary letter I wrote you last night. While I was writing it your letter was lying in front of me and my eyes were fixed, as they are even now, on a certain word in it. There is something obscene and lecherous in the very look of the letters. The sound of it too is like the act itself, brief, brutal, irresistible and devilish.

Darling, do not be offended by what I wrote. (*Letters* 268-269, *Selected* 180)

Joyce could not help engaging in the very behaviors that disgusted him and that he worried would offend or enrage Nora; in fact, exciting disgust in himself and offense and rage in Nora seems to have been part of the goal and enjoyment for Joyce. He wanted to thrill himself with the possibility that Nora might leave him, but at the same time, he did not want her to actually go. Nora was not the only one who could find fault with their drama, though often his disappointment has just as much to do with her failure to be as interested in literature and the arts as he. Joyce told her that he was "a little disappointed in you," asking her "Are you with me, Nora, or are you secretly against me?" and asked her to "be only a little kinder to me, bear with me a little even if I am inconsiderate and unmanageable," to "Let me love you in my own way" (27 October 1909, *Letters* 255-257, *Selected* 174-175). The masochistic tone of the letter is quite clear, and Joyce clearly revels in it, even if he does not enjoy it, exactly. But even in a masochistically apologetic letter, Joyce can not help taking up the other side of the dynamic, indulging his paranoia and, ironically, chiding Nora with the fruits of his own masochism. This dynamic went beyond Joyce's sex life, consuming his psyche with an intense totality, which prompted him to write to Nora:

> I dare not address you tonight by any familiar name.
>
> All day, since I read your letter this morning, I have felt like a mongrel dog that has received a lash across the eyes. I have been awake now for two whole days and I wandered about the streets like some filthy cur whose mistress had cut him with her whip and hunted him from her door. . . .

> I have lost your esteem. I have worn down your love. Leave me then. Take away your children from me to save them from the curse of my presence. Let me sink back again into the mire I came from. Forget me and my empty words. (18 November 1909, to Nora; *Letters* 265, *Selected* 177)

The letter continues in the same vein. Part of the dynamic is Joyce's fear – or desire – that he is offending Nora. At the apex of this desire – or nadir of this fear – is the thought that she will leave him. The dynamic pivots on this thought, and when he reaches it, Joyce moves from uninhibited and unconventional sexuality to masochistic apology and extreme debasement. But he can only stand so much reigning himself in before he is driven to unleash the strangest, darkest parts of himself again and set them on the page.

This dynamic is repeated as the dynamic of literary composition in the villanelle episode of *A Portrait*, which appears immediately after the literary theory episode in a striking juxtaposition. Joyce wrote both episodes when this exchange of letters with Nora was fresh in his mind, probably with the letters themselves at his side. Both episodes partake of this dynamic when they deal with Emma: in the literary theory episode, Stephen moves, in the space of a page, from criticizing Emma "with conscious bitterness" (216) to doubting his own judgment, nearly convincing himself at the end that "he had judged her harshly" (216). His anger and bitterness, far from being mistaken, work on his mood: "His mind, emptied of theory and courage, lapsed back into a listless peace" (216). Literary composition is a *process* Stephen goes through; in the first step he rids himself of theories of literature and enters into a more emotionally vivid state. In this way, it is rather the opposite of the process Stephen goes through to articulate his literary theory, in which he strives to distance himself from his perceptions.

In the villanelle episode, the same pattern of anger followed by doubt repeats, amplified. The episode begins with Stephen's waking from a vague dream, which we have every reason to believe is like his earlier dream, in which "A figure that had seemed to him by day demure and innocent came towards him by night through the winding darkness of sleep, her face transfigured by a lecherous cunning, her eyes bright with brutish joy. Only the morning pained him with its dim memory of dark orgiastic riot, its keen and humiliating sense of transgression" (99). The dream in the villanelle episode is a little different in character; Stephen has wrestled with religion and given it up. He has no guilt over his frequent solicitation of prostitutes, and so this time he awakes to "sweet music! His soul was all dewy wet. Over his limbs in sleep pale cool waves of light had passed" (217). Stephen believes he is experiencing "An enchantment of the heart!" (217), but this enchantment seems more vague than the sharp *quidditas* that Stephen describes in his aesthetic theory (213). His theory becomes the "enchanted days" of his villanelle – fodder for his poem but not an accurate description of his own method of composition, which relies more on fantasy and imaginative association than on *quidditas*, more on one thought leading to another for an interior, personal reason rather than a reason arising from the poem itself. Critics argue that Stephen's villanelle is not very good, and it is had to disagree with them. It is vague. It lacks *quidditas*. But even if it is bad, it is art, and its composition tells us something about how Joyce understood composition. *Quidditas* may be necessary to a good finished poem, but it is not, for Joyce, the beginning of the process.

The sexual overtones deepen as Stephen gives himself further to imagination: "In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh. Gabriel the seraph had

come to the virgin's chamber. An afterglow deepened within his spirit, whence the white flame had passed, deepening to a rose and ardent light. That rose and ardent light was her strange willful heart" (217). Despite the word virgin, which is vague at best when modifying *imagination*, the passage is deeply sexual; the word *ardent*, in particular, is drawn into the villanelle as the first word describing the "temptress's" wantonness and sexualized danger, and the rose develops sexual overtones not unlike those in the medieval poem *The Romance of the Rose* as the episode unfolds. This, too, is from Joyce's letters to Nora: "One word of praise from you fills me with joy, a soft rose-like joy" (31 August 1909, *Selected* 165). Ellmann tells us to compare this to the end of the "bird girl" episode, and indeed, the two episodes are linked (*Selected* 165n?, *Portrait* 172). Stephen's move from boyhood to adulthood – "His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood" (170) – happens in a sexual and artistic context – "He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul" (*Portrait* 170). Put another way, Stephen's growth as an artist is particularly marked by sexuality.

As the composition progresses, Stephen moves from his vague, enchanted afterglow to a perception of Emma's brutality: "The roselike glow sent forth its rays of rhyme; ways, days, blaze, praise, raise. Its rays burned up the world, consumed the hearts of men and angels" (218). The same "roselike glow" that is so wonderfully enchanting grows powerful and inspirational, and finally, to use one of Joyce's favorite words, brutal. This brutality leads to the composition of a new stanza, "*Your eyes have set men's hearts ablaze / And you have had your will of him. / Are you not weary of ardent ways?*" (218) and then to a lull: "The rhythm died away, ceased, began again to move and beat. And then? Smoke, incense ascending from the altar of the world," "*the*

smoke of praise" in the villanelle (218). This closely mirrors one of Joyce's most explicit letters to his wife:

> The last drop of seed has hardly been squirted up your cunt before it is over and my true love for you, the love of my verses, the love of my eyes for your strange luring eyes, comes blowing over my soul like a wind of spices. My prick is still hot and stiff and quivering from the last brutal drive it has given you when a faint hymn is heard rising in tender pitiful worship of you from the dim cloisters of my heart. (2 December 1909, *Selected* 181)

Brutal, frank, intense sexuality, closely followed by adoration, by spices or incense and hymns that rise, seemingly without men's voices or volition being involved, occur in both letter and novel. Much of this episode draws from this single letter, a letter that he wrote not long before he wrote this chapter – a letter he probably had in his mind if not by his side as he wrote the chapter.

At this point, the composition stalls again, and Stephen turns to imagination, this time laced with memory, and to real-world senses. All three begin to work together: "Having written [the stanzas of the villanelle] out he lay back on the lumpy pillow, murmuring them again. The lumps of knotted flock under his head reminded him of the lumps of knotted horsehair in the sofa of her parlour on which he used to sit" (219). Stephen drifts on the memories brought about by this physical sensation until he finds himself thinking of the priest he believes Emma has chosen over him. At this point, "Rude brutal anger routed the last lingering instant of ecstasy from his soul. It broke up violently her fair image and flung the fragments on all sides. On all sides distorted reflections of her image started from his memory" (220). Stephen lists these distorted

reflections, but it is just as well to turn back to the letter this episode draws from to see how Joyce felt similarly about Nora: "Nora, my faithful darling, my sweet-eyed blackguard schoolgirl, be my whore, my mistress, as much as you like (my little frigging mistress! my little fucking whore!) you are always my beautiful wild flower of the hedges, my dark-blue rain-drenched flower" (2 December 1909, *Selected* 181). As with Joyce's love for Nora, Stephen's love for Emma is complicated: When he sees her, he feels that "however he might revile and mock her image, his anger was also a form of homage" (220). Anger is not the right word for what Joyce felt for Nora – his favored *brutal* gets closer to the matter – but Joyce feared that the raw, intense, frank emotions he felt were similarly violent, powerful, wild, and animalistic at the same time as he thought of them as something to celebrate:

> side by side and inside this spiritual love I have for you there is also a wild beast-like craving for every inch of your body, for every secret and shameful part of it, for every odour and act of it. My love for you allows me to pray to the spirit of eternal beauty and tenderness mirrored in your eyes or to fling you down under me on that soft belly of yours and fuck you up behind, like a hog riding a sow, glorying in the very stink and sweat that rises from your arse, glorying in the open shame of your upturned dress and white girlish drawers and in the confusion of your flushed cheeks and tangled hair. It allows me to burst into tears of pity and love at some slight word, to tremble with love for you at the sounding of some chord or cadence of music or to lie heads and tails with you feeling your fingers fondling and tickling my ballocks or stuck up in me behind and your hot lips sucking off my cock while my head is wedged in between your fat thighs, my

> hands clutching the round cushions of your bum and my tongue licking ravenously up your rank red cunt. . . . (2 December 1909, *Selected* 180-181)

The writing is explicit, frank; Joyce uses blunt words used to describe the body and its features. These, to a certain mindset, to convention, seem brutal, even violent. But Joyce, while he could not help seeing them that way himself, also saw them as wondrous and inspirational, as the source of poetry and soul. The entire passage hinges on "there is also" and the word *or* in the last two sentences. Joyce is not entirely comfortable with the metaphorical location of these two kinds of feelings he is describing: are they "side by side," or is his physical love "inside this spiritual love"? Can they exist simultaneously at all, or only as distinct choices joined by *or*? Although Joyce grappled with reconciling these kinds of love, he clearly perceived them as coexisting simultaneously.

Joyce felt that a number of disparate things coexisted within himself and related to each other in their most extreme. But he was nervous that Nora might not perceive it that way, and so he made a point of instructing her on how to understand him, on numerous occasions. Immediately after this passage, Joyce wrote "All I have written above is only a moment or two of brutal madness" (2 December 1909, *Selected* 181). This is not a retraction, exactly, but a delimitation. Nora was meant to see into the strangeness of his soul, but not to think that this limited aspect of it defined him or their relationship. On 2 September 1909, he wrote, "I felt disgusted with myself. However if you read through all my letters from the beginning you will be able to form some idea of what I feel towards you" (*Letters* 243, *Selected* 166), and on 7 September 1909, he wrote similarly: "Now, my darling Nora, I want you to read over and over all I have written to you. Some of it is ugly, obscene and bestial, some of it is pure and holy and spiritual: all

of it is myself. And I think you see now what I feel towards you" (*Letters* 249, *Selected* 169). Joyce wanted Nora to hold all of his contradictory and extreme aspects in her mind and heart at once, and he wanted her to accept all of it. But Joyce's understanding of how sex, love, literature and the real relate is probably best revealed in this striking metaphor:

> Do you know what a pearl is and what an opal is? My soul when you came sauntering to me first through those sweet summer evenings was beautiful but with the pale passionless beauty of a pearl. Your love has passed through me and now I feel my mind something like an opal, that is, full of strange uncertain hues and colours, of warm lights and quick shadows and of broken music. (21 August 1909, *Selected* 161)

Nora probably knew what pearls and opals are, but she may not have know the depth of the metaphor for Joyce, who would have known the resonance of the pearl as Christian symbol, and would have known that in the medieval poem "The Pearl," the pearl is "maskelleȝ" – pure, without mark or sin. The fire and color in the opal, then, align with sin and sexuality.[34] In Joyce's theology, these quickened life and made it holy.

The composition of the villanelle is a consummation: In the lull that precedes the final stanza, Stephen makes "a cowl of the blanket and [stares] at the great overblown scarlet flowers of the tattered wallpaper. He tried to warm his perishing joy in their scarlet glow, imagining a roseway from where he lay upwards to heaven all strewn with scarlet flowers" (222). The cowl brings Stephen's memory back to the time he and Emma nearly kissed, ten years earlier, on the tram home; he remembers the incident in the same language originally used to describe it (69, 222). Ten years earlier, he wrote a

poem on the occasion, although that poem is only described and not presented in the novel. In that poem, "the kiss, which had been withheld by one [Stephen] was given by both" (71). The composition of this poem, the villanelle, ends with Stephen's imagining the vaginal "roseway" that Emma's "roselight" has become; it is more brutally material now, more closely related to the "overblown scarlet flowers of the tattered wallpaper" (222). He remembers the night on the tram, imagines giving her the villanelle, imagines her betraying him by showing it to her family, and then

> He began to feel that he had wronged her. A sense of her innocence moved him almost to pity her, an innocence he had never understood till he had come to the knowledge of it through sin, an innocence which she too had not understood until the strange humiliation of her nature had first come upon her. Then first her soul had begun to live as his soul had when he had first sinned: and a tender compassion filled his heart (223).

Stephen thinks of Emma's maturing sexuality, and this finally interrupts the dynamic movement from anger and lust to guilt and shame, bringing all of the pieces of his fractured perception of her together into one cohesive unit and bringing the poem to an end. As the earlier poem ended with a kiss that never happened, the composition of the villanelle ends when he imagines "Her nakedness yielded to him, radiant, warm, odorous and lavish-limbed, enfolded him like a shining cloud, enfolded him like water with a liquid life: and like a cloud of vapour of like waters circumfluent in space the liquid letters of speech, symbols of the element of mystery, flowed forth over his brain" (223), and he completes the poem. Critics speak of Joyce as figuring composition in feminine

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[34] This mark in what's otherwise pure appears in the "bird girl" episode as well: "Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign

terms, focusing particularly on "the virgin womb of the imagination," but this metaphor pales in comparison to Gabriel's fertilization, the sexuality of the episode and its final consummation.

* * * * *

Joyce's dirty letters to Nora, although full of titillating material, were not merely tools for sexual release. In them, he revealed how he saw sex, art, love, and the materiality of the world relating to each other, and how that all hinged on Nora: "I have loved in her," he wrote, "the image of the beauty of the world, the mystery and beauty of life itself, the beauty and doom of the race of whom I am a child, the images of spiritual purity and pity which I believed in as a boy" (19 November 1909, to Nora, *Letters* 267, *Selected* 179). For Joyce, everything he wanted to bring to life in literature was accessible to him through Nora, and inaccessible to him without her:

> I like to think of you reading my verses . . . . When I wrote them I was a strange lonely boy, walking about by myself at night and thinking that some day a girl would love me. But I never could speak to the girls I used to meet at houses. Their false manners checked me at once. Then you came to me. You were not in a sense the girl for whom I had dreamed and written the verses you find now so enchanting. She was perhaps (as I saw her in my imagination) a girl fashioned into a curious grave beauty by the culture of generations before her, the woman for whom I wrote poems like 'Gentle lady' or 'Thou leanest to the shell of night'. But then I saw that the beauty of your soul outshone that of my verses. There was something in you higher than anything I had put into them. And so for this reason

upon the flesh" (*Portrait* 171).

> the book of verses is for you. It holds the desire of my youth and you, darling, were the fulfillment of that desire. (21 August 1909, *Letters* 236-237, *Selected* 160-161)

Joyce decides in favor of the real girl over the literary, imagined one. Nora, to his mind, made him a man, but more than Nora, it was the whole of his set of experiences beginning with his leaving Dublin with her and ending with his leaving Rome committed to being an artist. For Joyce, the real is inextricably linked to Nora. All of his concerns about the importance of the material come back to her. Meeting her instantly taught him the difference between his literary idea of a theoretical girl and the real thing, and life with Nora developed Joyce's understanding of the importance of material concerns in a way distinct from conventional morality and social expectations – in a way that differed from what he could learn from "the girls [he] used to meet at houses." Additionally, Joyce makes clear that there was something lacking, to his mind, in his poems, and he puts Nora on a higher pedestal than them. They are desire, but she is fulfillment: Joyce makes clear that merely imaginative literature is flawed; literature must be quickened by experience, and these poems were not.

His future writings, however, would be: "I *know* and *feel* that if I am to write anything fine or noble in the future I shall do so only by listening at the doors of your heart" (?25 October 190, *Selected* 173), Joyce told Nora, more than once, perhaps most notably in his letter of 5 September 1909:

> Guide me, my saint, my angel. Lead me forward. Everything that is noble and exalted and deep and true and moving in what I write comes, I believe, from you. O take me into your soul of souls and then I will become indeed the poet of my

> race. I feel this, Nora, as I write it. My body will soon penetrate into yours, O that my soul could too! O that I could nestle in your womb like a child born of your flesh and blood, be fed by your blood, sleep in the warm secret gloom of your body! (5 September 1909, *Letters* 248, *Selected* 169)

This letter resonates with the Rochesterian poem "The Wish,"[35] except that the motivation in "The Wish" is mere lust; for Joyce, the motivation is the much deeper desire to be remade, to be "purified" into a life steeped in the sexual and the material, steeped in the source of what "is noble and exalted and deep and true and moving." Art, for Joyce, is, like the soul, deeply wrapped up with physical reproduction and all that entails: sex, gestation, birth, and the demands of family life. These give his art both perspective and subject. They also provide the "new personal experience" Stephen requires to explain "artistic conception, artistic gestation" (*Portrait* 209). In fact, Joyce refers to *Portrait* as "the book I have written, the child which I have carried for years and years in the womb of the imagination as you carried in your womb the children you love" (21 August 1912, to Nora; *Letters* 308, *Selected* 202-203).

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Joyce, as we see in his letters to Nora, the passages from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young* Man, and the aesthetics that grew out of them, was a catholic writer – a broad inclusivity guided his writing. As opposed to a narrow moralism or moral relativism, it is poly-moral, nearly pan-moral – a pearl that is shot through with a flame. This approach

35 "Oh, that I could by any chemic art / To sperm convert my spirit and my heart, / That at one thrust I might my soul translate / And in the womb myself regenerate! /There steeped in lust nine months I would remain, / Then boldly fuck my passage back again." The poem is often attributed to the Earl of Rochester, but it's doubtful that he wrote it; it was published when he was fourteen years old. See Thorpe and Lane.

to literature is so full of morality and feeling as to challenge readers, who often have difficulty getting their bearings, especially if they are accustomed to a more narrow morality of literature. Wayne Booth wrote in *A Rhetoric of Fiction* that

> We can agree that *Portrait* is a better work because the immature author has been effaced; Joyce may indeed have found that effacing the commentary was the only way he could obtain an air of maturity. But the fact remains that it is primarily to this immature commentary that we must go for evidence in deciphering the ironies of the later, purer work. ("Problem" 464-465).

Booth finds gems which do not exist in *Portrait*, and he finds, on the whole, a complicated attitude "combining irony and admiration in unpredictable mixtures" ("Problem" 465). He seems irritated that Joyce eliminated the richness of his authorial comment on Stephen:

> Whatever intelligence Joyce postulates in his reader – let us assume the unlikely case of its being comparable to his own – will not be sufficient for precise inference of a pattern of judgment which is, after all, private to Joyce. And this will be true regardless of how much distance from his own hero we believe him to have achieved by the time he concluded his final version. We simply cannot avoid the conclusion that to some extent the book itself is at fault, regardless of its great virtues. ("Problem" 466-467)

But Joyce's genius was to step back a bit and allow for precisely the ambiguity with Booth finds irritating, to allow us to see Stephen whole, as pompous and silly and heartbreaking all at once. Joyce gained not only a maturity of presentation, but also the fullness of compassion, which can both suffer and laugh with a character or a person at

the same time. Booth sees two alternatives: find out whether we should view Stephen ironically or sympathetically at any given moment, or accept the proposition that "[t]o read modern literature properly we must refuse to ask irrelevant questions about it; we must accept the 'portrait' and no more ask whether the character portrayed is good or bad, right or wrong than we ask whether a woman painted by Picasso is moral or immoral" ("Problem" 460). But Joyce's revised presentation of the *Stephen Hero* material in *Portrait* requires us not to put aside such judgments, but to hold as many of them as possible at any given moment.

In addition to this catholic morality is the compassion that Stephen feels when he thinks of Emma's maturing sexuality, the compassion that brings his brutal lust, his anger, his shame and guilt – and the corollaries that he perceives in Emma – into one whole. What's missing is the feeling that Joyce had towards Nora, which allowed him to indulge in what he saw as brutal acts with her while at the same time feeling spiritually sanctified. Joyce was able to see Stephen's faults and his assets at once, and to see them, often, in the very same act. He was able to look at Stephen with compassion, and he calls on us to do the same: to hold the entire *Portrait* in mind at once, not sequentially, as we would a work of music, but simultaneously, as we would a work of visual art, or a portrait. He uses Lessing's ideas of *nebeneinander* and *nacheinander* – the same ideas Stephen mulls over in chapter three of *Ulysses* – to compose *A Portrait*. He aims for a kind of eternity, where all time – or all the events of the book – are present at once.

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It was somewhat miraculous that Joyce was able to surmount all of these obstacles and, in doing so, create the extraordinary *Portrait* that we know today. Joyce, through *Portrait* and his other works, became more than just a writer – he became an inspiration to innumerable writers, and singlehandedly he profoundly changed modern literature. His influence is incalculable and manifold. It is also often very specific: The epigraphic character, and a number of its usual features, find their beginning in Joyce's aesthetic theory episode and the changes in Joyce's life that gave rise to its specific features.

Although no scholars have written about the epigraphic character as such, many novelists have adopted up the figure and used it to their own ends. Often, the basic features remain the same, and often, the writer pays specific homage to Joyce. Joyce's influence on Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* is so obvious as to barely need remarking; Joyce himself reviewed the book favorably. O'Brien also wrote Joyce into *The Dalkey Archive* as a character. Most specifically, O'Brien also employed a lazy student writer as his protagonist and epigraphic character. [His character's] outright philosophizing about literature with irreverent whimsy and a lackadaisical approach to school, when combined, create a similar dynamic to that in the aesthetic theory episode, although O'Brien takes them on a different route. Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* features several "ghost references"[36] to Joyce, which highlight the ways the novel takes up Joyce's ideas about sex, god, eternity and compassion and creates a much richer and more sustained treatment of these aspects of the epigraphic character. Greene's novel does not have a discrete aesthetic theory, but Maurice Bendrix's repeated reflections on writing, and the novel's very structure, use many aspects of the epigraphic

character, moving epigraphic utterance from a discrete phenomenon within a book to a more integrated feature of the novel. Philip Roth draws our attention to Nathan Zuckerman's connection to Stephen Dedalus by titling a chapter of *The Ghost Writer* "Nathan Dedalus"; in his second Zuckerman trilogy, the so-called American trilogy, Roth takes up Joyce's use of the writer's writing and process as an investigation into writing and empathy. And David Lodge makes his debt to Joyce known in numerable references in his fiction; Lodge returns the focus of the epigraphic character to the friction between literary theory and fiction itself in his academic trilogy.

Although each of these novels uses the epigraphic character, each has its own distinct style and content focus. They are not merely plays on each other, but fully developed novels in their own right. The epigraphic character, in other words, is a flexible fictional figure, and can appear in a range of novels. Most, however, detect Joyce's ambivalence about literary theory versus fiction proper, and most play liberally with refraction and irony, creating a somewhat unstable text, as Booth might have it, often focusing on the compassion and empathy that such instability requires. Some focus on the question of what literature does or can do, which Joyce inherited from Lessing and revolutionized. Even among those, most are deeply cagey about the mystery of writing and share a sense that writing is irreducible to a stable, nonfiction argument, but is, as Joyce's view of Nora and Stephen's view of Emma, alive with disparate elements that coexist in a difficult dynamic and that, at times, coalesce into an eternal moment beyond logic and judgment.

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[36] See Rabinowitz.

CHAPTER THREE

Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* and the Reification of the Epigraphic Character

Joyce may have invented the epigraphic character, but Flann O'Brien recognized the invention, reified it, popularized it with other novelists, and expanded its possibilities. For Joyce, the epigraphic character was not a tool or figure of fiction, but a result of his struggle to reconcile his life with his art; his earlier, adolescent self with his older, adult self; and theory with practice. The end product was the epigraphic character, who said one thing while Joyce meant another. Joyce used Stephen Dedalus, in his epigraphic moments, as a mouthpiece for the ideas of his younger self – ideas he needed to grow beyond in order to live in the real world as an author – and he used the rest of the epigraphic segment of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, such as Lynch's contributions and the pacing and arrangement of the segment's parts, to express himself at the moment of authorship. O'Brien, however, had different difficulties and different virtues, chief among them a desire to remain relatively anonymous, a keenly logical mind, a wicked sense of humor, and a particular brand of nihilism that left no potential target safe from his satire. O'Brien's mind was such that he could easily spot Joyce's epigraphic writing and analyze its component parts, both those particular to Joyce's work and those inherent in the epigraphic dynamic – and rebuild the epigraphic character anew from them, various literary theories, and other odds and ends he had to hand.

Many critics have dealt with O'Brien's relation to Joyce. David Cohen and J. C. C. Mays have written superbly on it, and, more recently, Kelly Anspaugh and Thomas

O'Grady have written well on O'Brien's anxiety about Joyce's influence. Many other studies of O'Brien deal with the Joyce connection in some depth[37]; few studies avoid it altogether. But such studies are somewhat limiting for studying O'Brien, as Joseph Browne has noted: Browne took exception to Robert Adams's treatment of Flann O'Brien in his book *AfterJoyce*, about Joyce's influence over writers who came after him. Browne wrote that he "believe[s] O'Brien deserves to be viewed in a more distinct and equitable context than that of being 'wholly *propter*-Joyce'" (150).[38] His ire is somewhat misplaced: Adams's book does not deal primarily with O'Brien; rather, O'Brien is one post-Joyce author among many treated in Adams's book, which is about Joyce's influence on many writers. It is fair enough to write a book about that subject. Browne, however, is right to note that "Joyce's linguistic finesse, subtle imagery, authentic speech and 'enormous humour' were unquestionably conditions of O'Brien's art; they were certainly not the cause" and that investigations like Adams's are the "kind of sweeping and often unquestioning pronouncement that infuriated O'Brien during his career and that has negatively influenced readers and critics to the present day" (150). Adams, however, was not so much looking at O'Brien as looking at Joyce. This is a problem for Browne's argument, but it is also *part* of Browne's argument: that we look too much to Joyce when talking of Flann O'Brien. But even this isn't as problematic as our looking too much at Joyce and too little at other writers. O'Brien is not the only writer who does not get the attention he deserves; paradoxically, he gets more attention *because* he shares so much

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[37] See M. Keith Booker, "The Bicycle and Descartes: Epistemology in the Fiction of Beckett and O'Brien," Ian Mackenzie, "Who's Afraid of James Joyce? Or Flann O'Brien's Retreat from Modernism," Joseph C. Voelker, "Doublends Jined: The Fiction of Flann O'Brien," and Andrzej Kopcewicz, "Limbo: From Finnegans Wake to At Swim-Two-Birds."

[38] Adams wrote "The contemptuous hash made of narrative, the drying out of description, the intrusion of the author as stylistic manipulator – all these conventions, with some others, mark O'Brien as a *post*-Joyce if not wholly *propter*-Joyce writer" (190).

with Joyce. Browne is right, however, in noticing the distorting effects of this attention: we see O'Brien too much through a Joycean lens and too little on his own terms.

More recently, Ronald Dotterer has written a particularly sensitive account of O'Brien's relation to Joyce. "Critical comparison [of O'Brien] with Joyce has been frequent," Dotterer writes, "as have analytical comparisons of their fiction, but less often has an awareness of this link to Joyce been seen as central and persistent in Brian O'Nolan's[39] formation of his own work.[40] Of the story of Joyce's reading *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Dotterer writes

> Joyce died in 1941, before relations between the two writers could become anything more than this promising connection. The consequent rebellion against an older rebel proved to be a bit of unfinished business for O'Nolan. Joyce's elevation, particularly by American academics, to the status of chronicler of contemporary Dublin had legitimate sting for Brian O'Nolan who, behind the mask of Myles na Gopaleen, actually held that office by most contemporary accounts of literary Dublin" (55).

It is interesting to consider the possibility that, given the chance, O'Brien and Joyce might have built a deeper friendship. But, given Joyce's proclivity for taking offense, which at least equaled his generosity towards Irish artists he esteemed, and given O'Brien's sharp satire,[41] it seems likely any friendship would have gone in the other direction. It is worth realizing, however, that relations between the two authors were, as

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[39] Flann O'Brien is a pseudonym for Brian O'Nolan, a name he spelled various ways, in Irish and English, with or without the initial *O*. In this chapter, I shall mainly use the name Flann O'Brien, to keep confusion to a minimum.

[40] William Chace, in "Joyce and Flann O'Brien," similarly argues for both the complexity and necessity of Joyce's connection to O'Brien's work.

[41] See O'Grady 204-5 for a wonderful account of the ways *At Swim* parodies Joyce's *oeuvre*.

Dotterer shows us, actually quite positive and that O'Brien greatly admired Joyce's work – with qualifications. In fact, O'Brien's ambivalence towards Joyce runs deep. "This link with James Joyce was one O'Nolan embraced, at times begrudgingly or unwillingly, but always out of some inner artistic and psychic necessity" (54). At his best, he saw Joyce as more human than most readers see him, as less of a hero or a villain, and celebrated his literary achievements as well as what he considered his flaws. O'Brien's "A Bash in the Tunnel," often held up as an example of O'Brien's hatred of Joyce, really shows both admiration and vexation. Dotterer maintains that O'Brien's "respect for Joyce's work [made] him reject 'the most overworked horse in the English ploughland' – the Joyce others have created as orthodox literary god" (61).[42]

All of the admittedly attractive and sensational positions in this debate are ultimately untenable: that Flann O'Brien is Joyce returned; that, conversely, Joyce's influence on O'Brien is minimal in comparison to other influences and barely matters; or that O'Brien loathed Joyce with a singleness of intent that blocked everything else out.[43] What is true is a deep ambivalence, one that O'Brien was aware of and not entirely ruled by – Joyce is not the only star in O'Brien's firmament. We must instead recognize Joyce's importance to O'Brien's work without maintaining that O'Brien's work is merely a pale imitation. In this chapter, I show one way in which O'Brien's relationship to Joyce is neither adulatory nor nugatory but in fact fruitfully imitative, taking something Joyce invented – the epigraphic character – and building on it, with profound results for the twentieth-century novel.

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[42]Dotterer quotes Brian O'Nolan to Robert Bierman, 13 July 1964, Brian O'Nolan Collection, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

[43] See Ian Mackenzie, "Who's Afraid of James Joyce? Or Flann O'Brien's Retreat from Modernism" for one example.

Flann O'Brien in some ways facilitated the simple equation of himself with Joyce. O'Brien never attracted an Ellmann; unlike with Joyce, with O'Brien the biography barely exists. He did, however, have several old friends and cronies who were also writers; among them, Anthony Cronin and Niall Sheridan have given us the best biographical reminiscences available. Sheridan excels at characterizing O'Brien during the period when he wrote *At Swim-Two-Birds*, while Cronin provides a wealth of detail, but the lack of more thorough biographical sources makes the equation of O'Brien with Joyce easier. O'Brien also obscured his identity, hiding behind various pseudonyms, mainly for professional purposes. As a civil servant, he found it necessary to keep his reputation and his relations with those he worked for or might work for – since he worked in politics, a public and shifting sphere – as clean as possible. As a satirist, he found this an especially difficult task. Since he was identifying if not naming others, it was necessary not to name himself. After his father's death in 1937, O'Brien took on the maintenance of his household, supporting his mother and all the children still at home.[44] As a family man – something he had in common with Joyce[45] – O'Brien found keeping his identity private especially crucial. His pseudonyms protected not only his identity and career, but also his livelihood and family. But such was O'Brien's nature that the pseudonym game was never straightforward. Indeed, O'Brien began playing with different identities before he became a family man, writing in high school and college under different names, impersonating others' writing, and in one instance, writing in Old Irish so that he could not only obscure his identity, but also have his cake and eat it too.

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[44] See Cronin, 79-82.

[45] Unlike Joyce, however, O'Nolan would continue to privilege his family above his literary career, much to the chagrin of a host of literary critics. Paradoxically, while critics take O'Brien to task for not privileging his literary career above his family, Joyce is taken to task for doing the opposite.

Such devices allowed him to say something without possibility of repercussion, or even, in the case of writing in Old Irish, without possibility of being understood.[46]

Brian O'Nolan also used different names so that he could create, in real-world venues, dialogues. He published frequently in newspapers under various names. To make things more confusing, it is virtually impossible to know for sure when O'Nolan is the writer and when he is not. Week after week, he wrote letters under several names, some answering the others, some defending the original writer, and all, in their way, funny. By using many personas, O'Brien created a kind of living novel – the novelist's version of street theater. But one also senses that O'Brien relished putting one over on people and that the primary impetus behind the identity game was largely impishness: O'Brien wants to be funny, not understood. He wants to laugh with you, but more than Joyce does, he also sometimes wants to laugh at you. More than writing novels per se, O'Brien wrote satire, and seems to have had difficulty reining in the impulse to subvert anything and everything.

What makes reading O'Brien difficult is that he's not simply fooling around. O'Brien's intelligence is formidable – he coasted through school when he finally entered it[47], and he was fascinated by science, logic, games, puzzles, language, and factoids. Sheridan writes that O'Brien had a "Byzantine love of ingenuity and complexity . . . expressed in a series of crazy competitions, conundrums, riddles and parodies" (39). To understand his humor, you have to know a lot, much of it specialized. With Joyce, you might not get it. With O'Brien, you might not get it, and the humor is at your expense.

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[46] Cronin doubts the veracity of the story of O'Brien's writing in Old Irish (54-55), but the story's plausibility speaks volumes about O'Brien's wiliness.

[47] See Cronin, 10-14. The O'Nolans were schooled sporadically at home; their father did not want them schooled in English.

Hugh Kenner calls O'Brien "an unrelenting rationalist . . . whose reason could trickle down irrefragable from any wrong premise, at times toward irascible action which distressed his friends, at other times toward sheer crystalline nonsense which delighted his readers (253-4). Kenner can't help noting that, even in his newspaper column, "Myles's[48] schemes . . . – in general his knack for rigging up alternative universes – had a kind of derived plausibility" (260). The epigraphic character, and the dynamic such a character created in a novel, would have been irresistible to a mind like this. We can see the various ideas about literature in *At Swim-Two-Birds* in the same vein, and to the extent that the book itself is an illustration of them, we can see the entire book this way.

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There are many ideas about literature in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, but only one which we can take as the epigraphic character's, despite most critics' taking all such ideas as the narrator's or even O'Brien's own. Only in the beginning does the narrator present an idea about literature as something he himself believes: other ideas about literature are more deeply embedded in the text. It is a critical commonplace about *At Swim-Two-Birds* that the novel actually has three openings, but I have not yet come across any criticism that deals with this theory in context. Here is the actual opening of the novel:

> CHAPTER 1
>
> Having placed in my mouth sufficient bread for three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired into the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and preoccupied expression. I

[48] Another of O'Nolan's major pseudonyms, Myles na Gopaleen, under which he wrote a regular, long-lived and much-loved column in *The Irish Times*.

> reflected on the subject of my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings. (9)

Perhaps the most important part of the actual opening is "CHAPTER 1." There are no other chapters in *At Swim-Two-Birds*.[49] Aside from being the book's best joke, "CHAPTER 1" mocks and undermines the very idea of three separate openings: It is the most conventional opening in existence, hence very at odds with the radical idea of three or more separate openings. It is probably a Trinitarian joke. But it is not merely conventional: in most novels, "CHAPTER 1" isn't part of the text, but part of the structure. Here, the reverse is true. In this way, the book's one opening signals that novelistic conventions cannot be taken for granted and that anything is likely to be turned into a joke. It signals that the reader's expectations will be toyed with, and that this in itself is part of the novel. One might as well make much of another character's potentially epigraphic utterance, Anthony Lamont's "Everything has a beginning and an end" (89), as credit the narrator's idea about openings.

There are, of course, three openings – about the Pooka, Furrisky, and Finn – but these are the openings to the narrator's novel, which is nestled, Chinese-box-style,[50] inside *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and O'Brien plays with the distinctions between these

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[49] Hearing this in a conversation with Susan Kinneen as an undergrad was what first made me want to read the book.

[50] This has become the conventional term for describing the nested structure of O'Brien's novel. See Rudiger Imhof, "Chinese Box: Flann O'Brien in the Metafiction of Alasdair Gray, John Fowles, and Robert Coover," as well as Anne Clissmann's "'The Story-Teller's Book-Web': *At Swim-Two-Birds*," Monique Gallagher, "Reflecting Mirrors," especially 131-132, and Jose Lanters, 272. See also Sheridan, who represents O'Brien as saying that "conventional notions of Time would be scorned [in *At Swim*]. Past, present and future would be abolished, and the work would exist in a supra-Bergsonian continuum –

different levels. Since chapters are not used to break up the book, O'Brien divides the book into separate parts with a blank line between sections, but these blanks do not always occur when the reader might expect them. Before the three "openings," there is a blank, but the third opening is interrupted without such a blank, when the narrator experiences a pain in his tooth. In reading this the first time, it becomes difficult to place oneself – already, on the second page of the novel – in a particular level of the story. We now have four worlds – the narrator's, Finn's, the Pooka's, and Furriskey's – "entirely dissimilar" to navigate, plus the knowledge that our own world is being written into the text in the form of conventional expectations ("CHAPTER 1"). The lack of a break between levels here hints that normally distinct levels or worlds in the novel can intrude upon each other, in much the same ways that pain can suddenly intrude upon us while we're busy doing something else – say, writing. The narrator further blends these levels by giving us another "opening" in his "*Description of my uncle*," which mirrors the other three "openings," all descriptions of characters. Here, reality, as the narrator tells it, mimics his novel. Later, the distinctness between levels becomes even more muddied.

These three, four, or five openings are all "entirely dissimilar," but whether they are "inter-related only in the prescience of the author" depends on a quibble: certainly, when we first read *At Swim-Two-Birds*, we cannot image how these openings relate. However, the inter-relatedness of the narrator's three openings becomes clear to us soon enough, and with some reflection, the interrelatedness of the novel's five openings become clear to us as well. This is to say that, while any first reading collapses the reader's time with the book's time – if we're reading according to the normal rules of

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communicating simultaneously on several planes of consciousness and also on various subliminal levels" (44).

fiction, we read the events in the order they are presented – subsequent readings, and especially critical readings involve no such time-scheme. This, I believe, is the root of the idea of the literary present tense: After a first reading, the sequence of events in a novel is already known, and has in a way already happened. On a subsequent reading, in the reader's mind, the events are both currently unfolding and have already happened; the entire book, or the remembered book anyway, is present. On a rereading, then – and *At Swim-Two-Birds* begs for critical re-readings – the openings are interrelated in the reader's mind as well.

Furthermore, before a given person reads a book, the whole of it is present as a kind of potential or platonic ideal. In terms of the novel's composition, as soon as the events are written, they have happened. Additionally, to call the author's understanding of the interrelatedness of the various separate openings "prescience" is to again collapse the levels of the novel: this time, the author and story levels. However an author creates a novel, it cannot be said that he sees into the future if he knows what happens later in the book, even if the events are created in story-order (the sequence in which they occur) or in discourse-order (the sequence in which they are told). The process is not fully organic – as lively as a novel might sometimes feel, whether to its readers or its characters, it is by definition artificial: made, not born. O'Brien knows all of this and presents it all succinctly as part of the flawed logic that he plays with.

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Interestingly, the narrator claims that a novel might have "one hundred times as many endings" as beginnings, but when we get to the end of both O'Brien's and the

narrator's novel, the two are intertwined, which suggests only one ending. Until now, the "biographical reminiscences" have been kept distinct from the narrator's novel, with the small exceptions of a missing blank line between segments here, an echoing of the narrator's novel in the way he tells his biographical reminiscences there, and a correspondence between his life and his plot and theme elsewhere. There are, as presented, three endings, but they are serial, not parallel, as *At Swim-Two-Bird*'s openings are. Antepenultimate, penultimate, and ultimate indicate that the endings are not presented in random order but must happen in this order; therefore they are serial, while the openings, which presumably could happen in any order, are parallel. "*Conclusion of the book antepenultimate*" is also "*Biographical reminiscence part the final*" (301). As with the beginning, this includes a "*Description of my uncle*," this time as "simple, well-intentioned; pathetic in humility; responsible member of large commercial concern" (312), which is a far cry from the description of him that opens the book.[51] Critics have argued that *At Swim-Two-Birds* is a *bildungsroman* and ends not only with the student's passing his exams with honors, but also with his accepting his uncle and the conventional societal values he embodies.[52] Thomas Shea, in contrast, has drawn attention to the way O'Brien carefully undercuts such a reading with irony, showing how "O'Brien only teases us with indications of the student narrator's new perspective of acquiescence and acceptance" (17). As a punchline to this sham *bildungsroman* ending, when the Angelus rings out, "[i]nstead of the watch reading 6, to coincide with the church bells calling the

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[51] When the uncle gives the narrator money to buy *Die Harzreise*, he take a sympathetic attitude towards him: "The redness of his fingers as he handed out his coins, his occupation with feeding for the nourishment of his body, these were two things that revealed for an instant his equal humanity" (44-45). What's remarkable here is that he is not merely grateful for the money, but is actually able to see the uncle, separate from this act, differently – and also that he acknowledges the fleetingness of this perception. Otherwise, his attitude towards his uncle is exemplified by the opening description.
[52] See Ruth ApRoberts and Anne Clissmann.

community to devotional prayers, the graduation gift now displays its age and debilitation, appropriately slowed (or perhaps even stopped) at five fifty-four"[53] (17). The symbol of the narrator's reconciliation with society malfunctions, and this undercuts not only the symbolic unification of the narrator with society but the very idea of imposing structures on the world.

O'Brien is like Joyce in denying the ultimate power of doctrines, codifications, and theories of aesthetics, but O'Brien's rejection extends much further than rejections of theories and includes structures imposed on human life, culture, and even the natural world. Shea tells us that

> The Angelus is traditionally rung at morning, noon, and night, calling the community to commemorate the Annunciation. Its name comes from the beginning of the prayer "Angelus Domini . . . ." (The Angel of the Lord . . . .) which liturgically commemorates the Incarnation of Christ, the embodiment of God in the human form of Jesus. Theologically, the Annunciation celebrates the achievement of human flesh without the physical interaction of sperm and egg.
>
> The vitality of the novel, however, centers on the ways it demonstrates that you can't make something from nothing. (18)

The Angelus, according to Shea, both undercuts the validity of the *bildungsroman* ending by showing that the watch, a poor match for the time-challenged narrator anyway, not only does not even work, but also is a blasphemous joke, merely by existing in this novel that, Shea maintains, "directs our attention to the physicality of language" (18). Shea further maintains that everything in the novel is created through language. This reading does not go far enough, however. It presumes that more popular interpretations of

[53] an even number.

metafiction as fiction that highlights the physicality of language are stable reference points in O'Brien's novel, but Shea knows that the vitality of the novel centers on its "dizzying but delightful disorientation." Orlick Trellis, created through rape, gives the lie to the notion that O'Brien's goal is to show us that "you can't get something from nothing" or to demonstrate the physicality of language. O'Brien's goal is more nihilistic. By employing the Angelus, and specifically by employing it from, in an earlier draft, "the Church at Snamh-da-En or S-t-B" (Unpublished Rota), O'Brien puts the Annunciation and Incarnation on the same level as "aestho-autogamy," the process by which Dermot Trellis creates Furriskey; the creation of half-fictional characters like Orlick; and the creation of "half and half caro and spiritus" beings of which the Good Fairy speaks:

> angelic or spiritual carnality is not easy and in any case the offspring would be severely handicapped by being half flesh and half spirit, a very baffling and neutralizing assortment of fractions since the two elements are forever at variance. An act of quasi-angelic carnality on the part of such issue would possibly result in further offspring consisting in composition of a half caro plus half the sum of a half and half caro and spiritus. Further carry on would again halve the spiritual content of the progeny and so on until it becomes zero, thus bringing us by geometric progression to an ordinary love-child with nothing but an unrepresented tradition on the spiritual or angelic side. (149)

O'Brien reduces the Incarnation to a math problem,[54] even though this is heretical: it is antithetical to the doctrine of hypostatic union, which maintains that both human nature and divinity are united but not combined in the person of Jesus Christ. At this point,

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[54] and includes a "wrong conclusion": you can theoretically halve something perpetually, and though it approaches zero, it will never become zero.

O'Brien's logic impinges on the narrator's world and implicates his own existence: If he can hear the bells ringing from this mythic world, and if his world can encompass Christ, a human that is also divine, is the narrator himself fictional? In the moment of the Angelus's ringing out, both the mythic world of his fiction and the world of religious revelation coexist with the narrator's world. O'Brien's logic either falls apart here, if it has not already, when we recognize that our world does not normally operate this way or becomes decidedly uncanny. If we are readers of capacious sensibilities, it does both.

The "antepenultimate" ending, or "[b]iographical reminiscence part the final" also involves three "works of reference." The narrator reads them to put off dealing with his uncle, and they seem at first largely to function as placeholders. The first two are comic entries on the vices of using tobacco and drinking tea. The last one is the "Extract" from William Falconer's[55] "The Shipwreck." First an overview of the poem is given. It is worth noting that, while Cantos 2 and 3 are represented, the words "Canto 1" are left out. We are being directed to the novel's beginning, "CHAPTER 1," and its joke about literary structure. The overview of the poem represents a typical eighteenth-century poem with its discursions into myth, lengthy exposition of character and emphasis on literary propriety and particularly strict rules of decorum and form. The poem, in other words, shows us another way of containing literary content and bringing it to a proper end. It is worth noting, however, that the poem is titled "The Shipwreck," and that it ends with the death of the crew and the total destruction of the ship.[56] The extract of the poem gives one the sense of a comic ending, with a representation of a compass that sets the world aright: "By this [use of the compass] magnetic variance is explained, [/] Just

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[55] "Faulkner" when spoken in the right accent.
[56] Not unlike how the narrator's story ends.

angles known, and polar truth restored" (307). This is the discourse ending of the Falconer extract – the last part presented. The story ending – the ending as the events would have unfolded in real time – is the death of everyone but Arion and the complete destruction of the ship. The compass, like the watch, is shown to be a feeble instrument, incapable of righting the world as it is extolled for doing. What does all of this mean for the notion of "a hundred times as many endings" (9)? Even if the sham *bildungsroman* ending fails to draw the biographical part of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and the narrator's novel together, several other factors do. The very fact of presenting a "biographical reminiscence " as a "conclusion of the book" draws the frame tale and the inner tale together structurally. What does it mean that O'Brien doesn't let stand the penultimate ending, in which Theresa ends Trellis's novel by burning the manuscript? This ending feels the most satisfyingly complete of all the endings, if only because it shows its metafictional trickiness most clearly. For O'Brien, however, such tricks are as unsatisfactory as any of the ways of ending and structuring the world that he exploded in the antepenultimate conclusion.

What do we make of the supposed third and "final" ending, which feels less final than the others? "Evil is even, truth is an odd number and death is a full stop. When a dog barks late at night and then retires again to bed, he punctuates and gives majesty to the serial enigma of the dark, laying it more evenly and heavily upon the fabric of the mind" (314). This ending seems to suggest something about endings – that, as a form, they are as impotent and silly as superstitions about numbers[57] and that there is only one

[57] *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* sheds some light on the ideas behind numbers in *At Swim*: O'Brien's number system seems to combine the Pythagorean number system (766), ecclesiastical symbolism (767), and the "ancient fancy" that "there's luck in odd numbers" (768). O'Brien's genius lies

true ending: death. Not coincidentally that is how *At Swim-Two-Birds* ends – with the death of "the poor German who was very fond of three" (316), the same number of beginnings and endings that *At Swim* supposedly gives us. Endings "punctuate and give majesty to the serial enigma" of life and literature, but in the end, O'Brien finds them as unsatisfying and ultimately meaningless as a dog's barking. He shows us he can write endings, giving us the ending of Joyce's "The Dead" (314) and Eliot's "The Waste Land" (316) as well as his own, but the ending doesn't really satisfy, and if we have read carefully – excruciatingly carefully – we can see that that's probably the way O'Brien liked it. Even the idea of circular structure, suggested by the missing "Canto 1" and the return to the notion of multiple beginnings and endings, feels wrong; it is overwhelmed by the many gag endings, structural endings, deaths, burnings, *good-bye*s, the graduation and the full stop at the end. O'Brien rejects both circularity and ending, and manages to achieve an ending that radically questions the concept of endings, beginnings, and structure itself.

In addition to the unity of the novel's actual opening, the tripartite nature of the student's novel's opening, and the muddying of those three distinct openings structurally,[58] *At Swim-Two-Birds*'s opening is complicated by being nestled in the middle of the act of eating. After the chapter designation, the book continues "Having placed in my mouth sufficient bread for three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired into the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and preoccupied expression." Additionally, the third opening, when it ends

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in combining such systems and notions and subverting them by pushing them to – and past – their logical extreme.

[58] By the lack of a space after the third opening mediating between the levels of the text and by the mirroring of the narrator's novel in the narrator's telling of reality.

without a break, is interrupted by this same piece of bread: "I hurt a tooth in the corner of my jaw with a lump of the crust I was eating. This recalled me to the perception of my surroundings" (10). The fact that food plays such a role may seem trivial until we place the opening in the context of Stephen Dedalus and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: This bread recalls Stanislaus Joyce's "bread-and-butter" test and the difficulties that Joyce went through to both write and make enough money to feed himself and his family. It also recalls the Wicklow bacon that features in the aesthetic theory episode of *Portrait* and the stew Stephen requests vegetables for from Donovan's field club.[59] From the beginning *At Swim-Two-Birds* not only parodies the lazy student writer Stephen Dedalus so splendidly exemplifies, but also engages the very elements of his character that Joyce considered central to the writing endeavor.

O'Brien mimics here, too, Stephen Dedalus's pattern of withdrawal from and engagement with the surrounding world as part of his compositional process. Later, he will even mimic Stephen's interest in walking and the rain.[60]

> The slam of the door released me from my anger. I finished my collation and retired to my bedroom, standing for a time at the window and observing the street-scene arranged below me that morning. Rain was coming softly from the low sky. I lit my cigarette and then took my letter from my pocket, opened it and read it. (14)

The narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* must withdraw from the world to concentrate on his writing, and in this we have an indication that his ideas might be untenable, unable to coexist with the real world. The narrator has the process down to a science: he knows

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[59] previous chapter, 70.
[60] previous chapter, 68.

exactly how much bread is needed to give him "three minutes' chewing," and he knows that this is all he needs to get us through his three different openings. (He is, apparently, a very quick writer – or the bread is particularly hard.) He does not, however, account for the sort of dental inconvenience the real world regularly provides. His love of the "contemplative life" (11) is such that it leads him to disdain his uncle's food, prompting him to supply us with the following quip: "*Quality of rasher in use in household*: Inferior, one and two the pound" (11). He associates food with his uncle, whom he frequently depicts eating, and whom he is not terribly fond of early in the novel.

The opening – everything up to the ten-page "*Extract from my typescript descriptive of Finn Mac Cool and his people*" (16) – refers even further to Stephen Dedalus in its focus on the narrator's laziness and habit of working in his bedroom:

> Aren't you very fond of your bedroom now, my uncle continued. Why don't you study in the dining-room here where the ink is and where there is a good book-case for your books? Boys but you make a great secret about your studies.
>
> My bedroom is quiet, convenient, and I have my books there. I prefer to work in my bedroom, I answered.
>
> . . . .
>
> I know the studying you do in your bedroom, said my uncle. Damn the studying you do in your bedroom. (11-12)

The implication is clear: the uncle suspects the narrator of wasting his time masturbating rather than studying. Without saying so much – perhaps to get past the censors, perhaps to paint a more realistic portrait of the uncle, perhaps for the humor value inherent to innuendo – O'Brien has suggested that the narrator is a wanker, or is at least regularly

accused of being one. Underneath the joke, O'Brien engages the sexual aspect of the epigraphic character: the notion that writing, as a form of creation that aims to represent a real, live, and material world, is necessarily entangled with sexuality and procreation, the only way to actually create human life, but that, as something that does not actually create life, is not procreative but merely recreative and masturbatory. O'Brien will continue to engage this aspect throughout the novel.

The narrator's friends are in on the joke as well, as we discover when he tells us himself about the studying he does in his bedroom:

> Whether in or out, I always kept the door of my bedroom locked. This made my movements a matter of some secrecy and enabled me to spend an inclement day in bed without disturbing my uncle's assumption that I had gone to College to attend to my studies. A contemplative life has always been suitable to my disposition. I was accustomed to stretch myself for many hours upon my bed, thinking and smoking there. I rarely undressed and my inexpensive suit was not the better for the use I gave it, but I found that a brisk application with a coarse brush before going out would redeem it somewhat without quite dispelling the curious bedroom smell which clung to my person and which was frequently the subject of humorous or other comment on the part of my friends and acquaintances. (11)

One can imagine the comments his college-age friends make. Contrary to Joyce, though, it seems the narrator is largely lazy and much less interested in sex. At one point, he is "alone in Nassau Street, a district frequented by the prostitute class," when he meets up with Kelly and "[p]urporting to be an immoral character . . . accompanied him on a long

walk," the "purpose" of which was the "Discovery and embracing of virgins," but the narrator is only playing at it (65). The narrator is not interested in sex – or in masturbation, except as jokes. Stephen Dedalus and James Joyce both took sex (including masturbation) and its ties to writing very seriously; O'Brien turns the whole thing into parody and then focuses mainly on the laziness, drinking and hangovers. This is one of the chief differences between Joyce and O'Brien: Joyce took the fullness of life, and sex as an important part of life, seriously as a guiding creed by which to create literature; it replaced his attempt at a codified aesthetics of literature.[61] O'Brien had too much fun playing with the logic of codified aesthetics and turning them around on themselves to worry about a model for literature. His literature does not aim to represent a real, live, material world, but merely – in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, anyway – to play with literature. The artist as wanker is thus a fairly apt metaphor for O'Brien's own approach to writing and literature. Joyce cared that an aesthetic theory gibe with reality; O'Brien was too busy having fun with theories that didn't gibe – with themselves, with literature, or with reality.

Far from being simply a reflection on the writer and his bedroom, the opening of the novel is also a counterpoint between bedroom and dining room. The entire passage is punctuated by mention of teeth and food – hurting teeth, getting food out of teeth, buying food, eating food, and dining habits surrounding it. O'Brien, it seems, registered the main themes of Joyce's ideas about writing, and in a few short pages presents them humorously, clearly, and fluidly. The opening then, despite introducing us to four characters at two levels of the story, is primarily about O'Brien's introducing us to the narrator as not simply an epigraphic character conceiving of theories that do not quite

[61] See previous chapter, 51-52 and 61.

square with the book he is in, but as a particular kind of epigraphic character: the lazy student writer. The similarities to Stephen Dedalus as epigraphic character are too many, too specific, and too perceptive to be accidental: O'Brien is giving us a variation on Stephen, turning him into a stock character, and by engaging the epigraphic aspects Joyce provided – food, sex, cigarettes, the bed, excrement or vomit, walking, withdrawal from the world, and ideas about literature – turning the epigraphic aspect of his character into a bit of fictional structure that other writers could use.

* * * * *

Much of the rest of what the critics call either the narrator's or O'Brien's own literary theories are actually presented as "an explanation spontaneous and unsolicited concerning my own [the narrator's] work, affording an insight as to its aesthetic, its daemon, its argument, its sorrow and its joy, its darkness, its sun-twinkle clearness" (32). In other words, these ideas are a controlling aesthetic vision: a plan for the narrator's novel. It's not what the narrator or O'Brien believes about literature, but an explanation of the rules of the fictional world the narrator is building. It is offered in the middle of a conversation the narrator has with Brinsley about "Literature – great authors living and dead, the character of modern poetry, the predilections of publishers and the importance of being at all times occupied with literary activities of a spare-time or recreative nature" (32), which may explain why the reader and critic might take it for the narrator's theory of literature, though not why they might take it for O'Brien's. It may seem like splitting hairs to distinguish between a theory about literature and a controlling aesthetic vision such as the one the narrator offers here; however, O'Brien demands this kind of precision

of his readers. The distinction between a theory about literature and a controlling aesthetic vision is an inherent part of the epigraphic dynamic: when we are confronted with an idea about literature in a novel, we usually want it to be a controlling aesthetic vision so we can use it as a key to that novel. We will often want to read such ideas as the author's own. We are sometimes, though less often, tempted to try to abstract from it an idea broadly applicable to literature as a whole. To be quite strict, though, these ideas are only ever *necessarily* iterations of the epigraphic character, and the extent to which they engage with the architectonics of the novel in which they appear or the author's own ideas about literature is part of the epigraphic dynamic. The urge to apply these ideas is ingrained in us as readers, but the target of the ideas varies from novel to novel. The slipperiness of the target is at the heart of the epigraphic dynamic.

In the case of *At Swim-Two-Birds* and the "explanation" that the narrator offers about his novel, we are presented with another referent: rather than applying the ideas in this explanation to *At Swim*, the narrator directly tells us they apply to *his* novel: the novel he's writing, not the novel he is in. O'Brien plays with the distinction between these (and other) novels in *At Swim*, but such play depends for its effect on there being a distinction to begin with. Many O'Brien criticism fail to maintain this distinction clearly enough, instead reveling in the fun of mashing everything together that they perceive O'Brien to be doing. But O'Brien is very deliberate, and never throws things together haphazardly.

Keeping in mind that what the narrator says is supposed to be an explanation of his novel, let us look at its parts, the first of which is the idea of the novel as a self-evident sham:

> It was stated that while the novel and the play were both pleasing intellectual exercises, the novel was inferior to the play inasmuch as it lacked the outward accidents of illusion, frequently inducing the reader to be outwitted in a shabby fashion and caused to experience a real concern for the fortunes of illusory characters. The play was consumed in wholesome fashion by large masses in places of public resort; the novel was self-administered in private. The novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer, could be despotic. In reply to an inquiry, it was explained that a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity. (32-33)

This is not nearly as outlandish as it sounds; it echoes Stephen Dedalus's idea of good literature's being static – one should not experience concern for the characters, a "kinetic" emotion, but pity or terror, "static" emotions. It is entirely possible that O'Brien was making fun of Dedalus and possibly Joyce. Of course, we know from the previous chapter of this dissertation that what Joyce believed changed through time and, by the end of writing *Portrait*, differed radically from what Stephen believes on this point: that

> the tragic emotion is static. Or rather the dramatic emotion is. The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. These are kinetic emotions. The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The esthetic emotion (I use the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing. (205)

If you've read Joyce and read O'Brien afterwards, the passages with the narrator and Brinsley always call to mind the passages with Dedalus and Lynch, and one of the great joys of reading *At Swim* is feeling, in these passages, that O'Brien is letting you in on what he liked and found worthy of comment, imitation and parody: largely, the aesthetic discussion and the college-boy banter. This knowledge in itself changes how we then reread *A Portrait*, with our focus more on the interaction between Dedalus and Lynch and less on the aesthetic theory. But this instance is perhaps the only real reference to Stephen Dedalus's theories of literature, the most direct overlap. What comment, exactly, does it make on *A Portrait*? O'Brien's narrator compresses his theory into a neat economical bundle; Stephen Dedalus gives his theory at much greater length. Any official-sounding words in Dedalus's theory flow into the discourse smoothly, unlike O'Brien's "self-administered," which is held up in opposition to "wholesome" and is clearly meant as a comic reference to onanism. O'Brien's narrator is supposedly concerned that the "despotic" author might trick the reader, while Stephen Dedalus is earnestly concerned about the deeper purpose of art. While this passage certainly refers to Stephen Dedalus and his theory of aesthetics, it does so light-heartedly: it is not a full critique of Dedalus's theories, but at most a quick dismissal and more likely a neutral reference that uses the Joyce material as a premise for comedy.

What, then, are we to make of the narrator's couching the discussion in terms of the play versus the novel? It is tempting to see this as a comment on Stephen Dedalus's lyrical, epical, and dramatic (*Portrait* 214), but for Stephen, these terms allude to something different from poems, novels, and plays, and have more to do with whether the artist's work represents merely himself or others as well, and have nothing whatsoever to

do with the audience.[62] A better match for the narrator's theory of the work of art as a self-evident sham can be found in Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, in English now known as the Alienation effect or A-effect. O'Brien's reference to Brecht with this passage may explain his puzzling insistence on his trip to Germany and his engagement to a German woman[63] – as well as his frustration at being seen almost solely in relation to Joyce. The essay the English-speaking world now knows as "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" appeared in English in the winter of 1936, when O'Brien was writing *At Swim-Two-Birds,* in the journal *Life and Letters* under the title "The Fourth Wall of China: An Essay on the Effect of Disillusion in Chinese Theatre."[64] Particularly interesting is O'Brien's choice of the phrase "the outward accidents of illusion," for in White's 1936 translation, *Verfremdungseffekt* was translated as "disillusion," and the piece uses the terms "illusion" and "disillusion" repeatedly – several times per paragraph in some places. Such terms are no longer used as frequently to refer to Brecht's idea; the A-effect has become the preferred English term. At the time, however, "disillusion" would have been a direct reference to Brecht's A-effect. O'Brien would have seen the essay; he was part of a group of students that

> formed in those years a sort of intellectual Mafia, which strongly influenced the cultural and social life of University College, and controlled – through some rather dubious electoral ruses – most of the College Clubs and Societies concerned with the Arts. The editorship of the magazine was usually passed from one member of the group to another. It was a useful mouthpiece, and entitled us

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[62] This is, of course, a gross reduction of the theory, which can be found on 214-215 of *A Portrait*.
[63] See Cronin 67-70.

> to tickets for the theatres and cinemas, and also review copies of books, which could be resold for half the published price. (Sheridan 35)

O'Brien, as a member of this cohort, would not only have read the Brecht piece but also have discussed it at length with several of his cohort. "Like the rest of us," as Niall Sheridan informs us, "Brian read everything he could get his hands on" (39).

Brecht's idea is essentially that conventional theater's illusions enable an audience to embed themselves emotionally in the story, sympathizing with the characters in terms of so-called universal values and failing to see their stories as determined in part by historical and social forces; this sympathizing thereby causes a larger kind of social blindness. This process is aided by the plays' being watched by large groups who are subject to a kind of group-think governing the social rules of going to a theater, which dictates a willing suspension of disbelief and therefore a lack of critical distance. O'Brien's novel effectively says the opposite here: that being amongst people keeps one grounded in reality, and being alone leads one to give in to flights of fancy or worse, to "self-administration in private." Much modern metafiction, along with our understanding that it achieves a highlighting of the rules by which fiction is written, read, and understood, may more properly be understood as Brechtian in origin and as examples of the A-effect than by the more confusing label metafiction, which should more properly indicate fiction about fiction – stories within stories, stories about writers writing stories, and so on. The term *metafiction* has largely come to mean fiction which enacts an A-effect. Effectively, both Brecht and O'Brien argue for a mechanism – an alienating

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[64] See John Willett's note in *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 99. Brecht first uses the term *verfremdungseffekt* in this essay, which was only published in White's English translation until 1949, when it was published in German.

device – to highlight a work's constructedness and to encourage the audience's critical faculty.[65]

For O'Brien, or for the narrator of *At Swim* anyway, a play has these "outward accidents of illusion" conventionally, and, contrary to Brecht, these accidents and the other audience members keep us grounded in the reality that we are watching fiction. For O'Brien's narrator, the play's "outward accidents of illusion" keep the audience from being "outwitted in a shabby fashion and caused to experience a real concern for the fortunes of illusory characters." For Brecht, Western theater lacks the "outward accidents of illusion" or alienating devices, and the theater's illusions are, to a conventional audience, seamless enough that they aid the audience in "assimilating a work of art as a whole" and "simply identifying itself with the characters in the play" (Brecht, trans. Willett 91)[66] – in other words, in outwitting them in a shabby fashion and causing them to experience a real concern for the fortunes of illusory characters. But, while it seems as though Brecht and O'Brien are diametrically opposed here, O'Brien has really just simplified Brecht's thought and adopted it for use in the novel. In effect, O'Brien's excessive metafiction matches Brecht's A-effect, as both call attention to the work's constructedness, partially through their sheer novelty.

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[65] We see commentary on such alienating devices in the "penultimate" (312) ending, when Trellis returns to the Red Swan hotel much the worse for wear and watches Theresa climb the stairs in front of him, noticing that

> [t]he edge of her stays, lifting her skirt in a little ridge behind her, dipped softly from side to side with the rise and the fall of her haunches as she trod the stairs. It is the function of such garment to improve the figure, to conserve corporal discursiveness, to create the illusion of a finely modulated body. If it betray its own presence when fulfilling this task, its purpose must largely fail.
>
> "Ars est celare artem," muttered Trellis, doubtful as to whether he has made a pun. (313-314)

For more on Theresa's stays, see also *At Swim* p. 43.

[66] "[R]egarding a work of art as a whole" and "identifying themselves with the dramatic personae" in White's translation, respectively (116).

Perhaps most important is the idea of literature as a "pleasing intellectual exercise." This is something we can match to O'Brien himself: Cronin speaks of O'Brien's "ironic stancelessness, the refusal to adopt any real side in any argument" (113). It can be hard to tell what O'Brien believes, because he doesn't believe anything; it's not as easy to spot an absence as it is to spot a presence:

> As a man, O'Nolan had no real intellectual curiosity either. In spite of his mental alertness, even effervescence, he frequently complained of boredom. He pursued no subject, even speculatively, beyond fairly narrow limits. Knowledge was an entertaining province in which a clever mind might disport itself, but it had no ultimate importance. The real questions were settled and the answers known. (Cronin 104)

O'Brien's use of one of the most political authors of the twentieth century is curiously apolitical. As with other ideas, Brecht's ideas about the despotism of conventional theater and about social justice become nearly unrecognizable in O'Brien's hands, fodder for his mad machinations of twisted logic and literary structure. If there is a key to *At Swim-Two-Birds*, it is surely this idea of literature as a pleasing intellectual exercise. It explains *At Swim* as a whole rather than just the narrator's novel, and it points us clear of one of the mains dangers of reading O'Brien: thinking you've found an ultimate meaning in his work. If, at any point, it seems O'Brien is saying something, we would be wise to look within ourselves to discern whether it is something we *want* O'Brien to have said. When we're done looking there, we'd be well advised to look at our ankles, where we are likely to find O'Brien pulling our legs.

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Immediately after saying we shouldn't believe in characters or be deceived into feeling sympathy for them, the narrator treats characters as if they are real, with working wages and so on:

> It was undemocratic to compel characters to be uniformly good or bad or poor or rich. Each should be allowed a private life, self-determination and a decent standard of living. This would make for self-respect, contentment and better service. It would be incorrect to say that it would lead to chaos. Characters should be interchangeable as between one book and another. The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet.

More than simply "trickl[ing] down irrefragable from [a] wrong premise," O'Brien's logic here contradicts itself. Unlike the idea of a self-evident sham, this idea does not readily suggest a real-world antecedent among serious theories of literatures. Indeed, the idea of characters' having lives outside their novels seems simply silly or whimsical, and the idea of them as employees even more so. It does, however, embed the idea behind many people's experience of sympathizing with a work's characters.[67] We should note, too, that O'Brien speaks of a very Marxist variety of sympathy, having to do with work-related issues: O'Brien is still referring to Brecht and the A-effect.

Brecht wanted to adapt the A-effect he observed in Chinese theater to use in Western theater as a tool for social critique: "A new theatre will need to employ disillusion among other effects if it is going to criticise society and present a historical

report of social changes when these have been successfully consummated" (123). Brecht mouths here the Marxist notion that the people must critique and change society, that by doing so they will effectively put an end to history,[68] and that revolution will result in a stable, equitable society with no further need to "criticise" or "reform the social structure of society" but only a need to "present a historical report of social changes" (123). "In this time of transition," Brecht declares, "everything must be considered from the social point of view," especially literary characters, to Brecht's mind (123). O'Brien gleefully takes him at his word. Here, we must make the distinction between a character and the imaginary person the character represents: the elementary distinction between signifier and signified. In its most basic example, the word *chair* is not the same thing as an actual chair. In the case of characters, the distinction becomes a bit more complicated because a fictional character by definition doesn't refer to an actual person, but to an imagined one. We are not accustomed to distinguishing between a fictional character and the imagined person behind it. In a play, of course, we have characters, the imaginary people the characters represent, and actors. O'Brien wrings as much confusion and fun as possible from the difference between plays and novels here. In a novel, the lack of actors makes it easier to collapse the distinction between characters as signifier, entirely bound by the words on the page, and characters as signified, fleshed out to everything we can imagine of them – their past, future, motives, psychology, what they do in the interstices of the plot: in short, anything that isn't specifically written. In Trellis's and the narrator's novels, O'Brien turns novelistic characters-as-signified – the imaginary people existing outside the strict words on the page – into actors – the people who, when the curtains

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[67] This is not only a fault of lay readers; even literary critics do this.

[68] an end to the need for the kinds of political events making up what we think of as history.

close and the lights go down, take off their makeup, collect their paychecks, and head home to their families. So Furriskey, for example, is not the same person when Trellis stops writing: he goes home to Peggy and his home, his dirty work left behind him.

This is not really what Brecht meant by the idea of treating characters as social beings, of course. "The presentation of the human being on stage stops at the 'eternal human element,'" Brecht complained. "The plot is so arranged as to contain such 'universal' situations that any man of any period or colour can express himself therein. All that happens on the stage is merely a cue for the 'eternal' answer – the inevitable, customary, natural, human answer. . . . History may affect environment, but it is powerless to alter the individual" (121-122). In contrast, "[i]n the "historicised" theatre. . . . [t]he emphasis is laid on the strange and peculiar elements, those that demand investigation" (122). Brecht gives the following example:

> A young girl leaves her family to take a job in a large town. . . . In the bourgeois theatre, such a situation has few possibilities: it is obviously the beginning of a story and. . . . [f]rom a certain point of view . . . is quite general: young girls often take jobs, and in this case the audience may feel interested to know whether anything special is going to happen to her. . . . In the 'historicised' theatre . . . . [t]he emphasis is laid on the strange and peculiar elements, those that demand investigation into this every-day occurrence. What! a family is prepared to let one of its members leave its shelter so that she may become independent and earn her living on her own? Is she in a fit state to do so? Will what she has learnt as a member of the family help her to earn her living? Can families no longer keep their children at home? Are they a burden? Was it always so[?] Is it the

> unalterable way of the world? Does the saying "Ripe fruit falls from the tree" apply here? If it is a biological fact, true for all ages, that a time must come when all children claim their independence, does it always happen in the same way, for the same reasons and with the same results? Those are some of the questions which the actors must answer if they are going to present this as a unique historical occurrence and if they wish to point to it as a custom which provides a key to the whole social structure of a certain transitory period. (121)

For Brecht, even universal human elements occur in a historical and social context which not only colors them, but changes and determines them. Brecht wanted audiences to notice this context and thus become social critics and actors themselves. He wanted to use the A-effect primarily to shake up the audience, break up the conventions that allowed them to ingest theater emotionally but not intellectually, and engage their critical faculties so that they could notice and engage with the historical particulars of a play – and indeed, Brecht's methods produce a particularly effective, engaging and moving theater. Brecht wanted plays to be more historically particular, and he wanted characters to be clearly subject to social forces rather than only subject to supposedly universal human emotions historically contextualized. O'Brien was mashing up genres and decontextualizing his characters. In the larger context of the novel, characters' having working wages and outside lives draws our attention not only to the Brechtian origins of the theory but also to O'Brien's play with textual levels and boundaries.

"The Fourth Wall" in White's translation of the title draws our attention to the theatrical concept of the invisible boundary between audience and stage. The fourth wall is the invisible wall between the audience and the actors – the one we all tacitly imagine

is there, that keeps the audience and actors from interacting. Breaking the fourth wall is an alienating device that makes the audience aware of their role with respect to the people on stage – rather than simply watching the play passively, the audience is startled into the consciousness that they are at a play. The fourth wall is an easier idea to work with than the other boundaries that exist in literature because we can visualize it. Its analogue in the novel would really be the boundary between the reader and the novel itself; alternately, we can conceive of it as the boundary between the reader and the author as represented by the novel. We can see the idea of the novel as a self-evident sham and the reader's regulating his degree of credulity as a warning to the reader that she might be outwitted in a more conventional way – through the use of irony. Irony, as a rhetorical phenomenon, involves this fourth wall. Wayne Booth writes of irony as something that "authors and readers achieve . . . together" (xiv); to do so, they must reach across the fourth wall and connect with each other. I think these boundaries are the more radical ones at play in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. They are, in some ways, less flashy than the silliness that goes on with Orlick Trellis's turning the tables on Dermot Trellis, or Sweeney's and Jem Casey's suddenly showing up after being spoken about, but a certain critical amount of such fireworks has the curious effect of flattening the work and making us see it as something the author is playing with, rather than as a world unto itself. In other words, these fireworks have an alienating or disillusioning effect – they become the "outward 'accidents' of illusion" that prevent the reader from "being outwitted in a shabby fashion" – the things that pull us out of identification and remind us that we're reading a novel.

O'Brien, however, reduces the ideas he found in "The Fourth Wall of China" to several "wrong premises." In the process, he flattens the A-effect into scaffolding for

metafiction, produces a wonderful bit of trademark O'Brien logic, and puts it into play to produce a wonderful comedy of fictional structure. The effect of the boundary crossing depends on what happens when you remove the fourth wall (or other walls). For Brecht, what happens is you wake up the audience and shock them into the knowledge that they are watching a play. For O'Brien, what happens is a leveling that depends on a logical error: taking actors as signifier and signified. He removes not only the fourth wall but also the wall between writer and written that exists within the narrator's novel. He does not, however, remove the boundary between the narrator and his novel. Thus we have a metafiction within a realist novel (though realist in a very slender sense of the term). When things cross between that boundary, they only cross one way – from the narrator's life to his work. This scaffolding plus the idea of the modern novel as a work of reference allowed O'Brien to include Jem Casey, the working class poet, as well as his own versions of Finn MacCool and Sweeney – the eternal/mythical element made historical and contemporary. Thus this theory widens his target to include working-class literature[69] and allows for the further comedy of putting the mythical Finn MacCool in the modern world, where his actions become decidedly unheroic, especially when he assaults Peggy Furriskey. Sweeney, however, when imported into the modern world, becomes a symbol of the modern Irish writer. O'Brien took Joyce's invention, combined it with Brecht's, twisted it around, and played it out to its logical extreme, thus creating something new: a particular kind of metafiction that was engaged with myth and social issues, and tended to operate outside the realm of normal logic. The combination of the modern world and the mythic within a matrix of metafiction and Marxism laid the

[69] like Jem Casey's. See Foley on the historical antecedents of Jem Casey.

groundwork for postcolonial writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, who admired and reviewed *At Swim* (162), and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and for metafiction as we know it.

* * * * *

The idea that characters should be interchangeable between books serves as a segue between the idea of characters as actors, who are interchangeable between plays, and the idea of the modern novel as a work of reference. The narrator explains that one of the foundational ideas of his novel is that

> [t]he modern novel should be largely a work of reference. Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before—usually said much better. A wealth of references to existing works would acquaint the reader instantaneously with the nature of each character, would obviate tiresome explanations and would effectively preclude mountebanks, upstarts, thimbleriggers and persons of inferior education from an understanding of contemporary literature. Conclusion of explanation. (33)

The conjunction of the "work of reference" idea and the idea of characters as actors gives rise to the lively Circle N Ranch episode, enabling O'Brien to import some classic Western action into the middle of Dublin, as well as rope in concern with labor issues and combine them with the mythical Cattle Raid of Cooley. Interchangeability between works of literature also lays the groundwork for characters to wander from one story to another within the narrator's novel, so that Sweeney can move from a character in Finn's storytelling to a character interacting with Finn, and Jem Casey can similarly move from being talked about to suddenly appearing. It enables, also, the bricolage of stories and

kinds of stories: of myth and modern fiction, that characterizes *At Swim*, which would be postmodern if it did not have such scaffolding present to explain it, or if the narrator's novel ever broke through to the frame story of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Always, the fact of the narrator and his explicating theories lay the groundwork for what would otherwise be postmodern pastiche. In the narrator's novel, other works of reference, such as a description of Trellis pulled out of the conspectus (40) and William Falconer's "The Shipwreck" are always presented as something the narrator reads or imports from another text. Unlike characters, they are not worked in to the fabric of the novel, but stuck in. We see the narrator reading these passages, or we are told they are "extracts," and they are all presented in the frame tale. By showing us the process of inclusion, O'Brien is actually being a conservative novelist. Were the process of inclusion not itself included, the effect would be more modernist and Eliotic – or else simply a matter of normal, barely remarkable literary allusion.

The novel as a work of reference is another of the narrator's ideas with roots in O'Brien's biography. Niall Sheridan tells us about "[t]he most ambitious of all Brian's literary schemes for making money," which

> was probably quite feasible, though a little ahead of its time. He . . . announce[d] that nobody had yet produced the Great Irish Novel. The time had come when it must be written, or rather, manufactured.
>
> This great saga (working title: *Children of Destiny*) would deal with the fortunes of an Irish family over a period of almost a century, starting in 1840. It would illuminate a whole panorama of social and political history – the Famine

> Years, faction fights, evictions, lecherous landlords and modest maidens, emigration, the horrors of the coffin ships, etc., etc. . . .
>
> Brian proposed that he, [Denis] Devlin, [Donagh] MacDonagh and I should write the book in sections and then stick the pieces together in committee. . . .
>
> A vast market was ready and waiting. Compulsory education had produced millions of semi-literates, who were partial to "a good read." . . . . We must give them length without depth, splendour without style. Existing works would be plundered wholesale for material, and the ingredients of the saga would be mainly violence, patriotism, sex, religion, politics, and the pursuit of money and power.
>
> *Children of Destiny* would be the precursor of a new literary movement, the first masterpiece of the Ready-Made or Reach-Me-Down School. . . . There was a short period of hectic activity, but the Great Irish Novel never materialized. (41-44).

Never materialized, that is, except as ideas reworked into *At Swim*. The motivation for it is the market, however; they want to manufacture or "make a book" in order to "make big money" – hence the jokes about making boot in *At Swim* (32). Classist sentiments are at the heart of both the *Children of Destiny* scheme and the narrator's idea about the modern novel as a work of reference; the goal of the *Children of Destiny* scheme was to sell books to those "mountebanks, upstarts, thimbleriggers and persons of inferior education" that the narrator of *At Swim* aims to "preclude . . . from an understanding of contemporary literature." Flann O'Brien was the kind of thinker who could come to two such disparate conclusions from the same premises.

The different motivations between O'Brien's scheme and the narrator's vision for his novel points us more firmly toward T. S. Eliot as another reference or target.[70] "The Waste Land" is itself a work of reference, in that it was composed of pieces from others' works in addition to original material binding those pieces together. It is tempting to see in the narrator's idea a reference to modernists using classical works in general, but Eliot stands out for not modernizing his myths in the way that Joyce does with *Ulysses*. In "The Waste Land," we do not have Bloom *as* Odysseus, but portions of text lifted out of other texts wholesale, much as the narrator of *At Swim* recommends lifting characters out of other texts wholesale. This, of course, means that readers who are not already familiar with the references tend to feel especially bewildered. In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Finn is still Finn and Sweeny is still Sweeny – no one stands in for them as a modern analogue. O'Brien goes one step further than Eliot and integrates the borrowed characters into their new context – a technique picked up by the magic realists who were writing in his wake. The ending of *At Swim* is another reference to Eliot's "The Waste Land" as well, with "good-bye, good-bye, good-bye" as an echo of "Shantih, shantih, shantih."

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We must read all of these literary theories in context. I addressed context briefly when I discussed how these theories are actually controlling aesthetic visions, offered in the middle of a conversation the narrator has with Brinsley about "Literature – great authors living and dead, the character of modern poetry, the predilections of publishers and the importance of being at all times occupied with literary activities of a spare-time

[70] Niall Sheridan notes that, in the intellectual university crowd O'Brien spent his time with, "Eliot was a big influence" (39).

or recreative nature" (32). Beyond that, they are presented in the middle of what is one of the funniest episodes in the book:

> I proceeded home one evening in October after leaving a gallon of half-digested porter on the floor of a public-house in Parnell Street and put myself with considerable difficulty into bed, where I remained for three days on the pretence of a chill. I was compelled to secrete my suit beneath the mattress because it was offensive to at least two of the senses and bore an explanation of my illness contrary to that already advanced.
>
> *The two senses referred to*: Vision, smell.
>
> On the evening of the third day, a friend of mine, Brinsley, was admitted to my chamber. He bore miscellaneous books and papers. I complained on the subject of my health and ascertained from him that the weather was inimical to the well-being of invalids. . . . He remarked that there was a queer smell in the room. (29-30)

Here, the stock character of lazy student writer reaches its apogee (or nadir) with a three-day hangover, a humorously intellectual expression for vomiting, and a malodorous suit of clothing that literally underlies the narrator's expression of the literary ideas on which he bases his novel. The whole room stinks when the narrator expounds these theories. O'Brien may be imitating Joyce's bit with Lynch and the dried cow dung; O'Brien, however, does not give vomit any deeper meaning unless we read these theories as regurgitations of others' ideas, half-digested. The narrator then recounts, with great detail and dialogue, the leaving of the gallon of half-digested porter. After, he and Brinsley smoke cigarettes and the narrator tells us that "[u]nder the cover of the bed-

clothes I poked idly with a pencil at my navel" – a brilliant metaphor for writing, which economically and evocatively combines secrecy, sexuality, solipsism and laziness. What this suggests for our interpretation of the theories is that it is a mistake to take them too seriously. After the narrator presents the theories, Brinsley gives his opinion of them: "That is all my bum" (33). Brinsley's bum stands in parodic contrast to the Venus of Praxitiles's, which Lynch finds so moving. Brinsley, here, is playing Lynch to the narrator's Dedalus, but the scene differs drastically from the matching scene in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Lynch ribs Dedalus, of course, but Dedalus is determined to steer the conversation in a serious direction, and Lynch eventually falls in step with him, responding to the best parts of the literary theory with "I see it," "Bull's eye! . . . Go on," and "Bull's eye again! . . . Tell me now what is *claritas* and you win the cigar" (212). In contrast, the controlling aesthetic vision section of *At Swim* stays in the mood of an adolescent romp, and Brinsley's sole response is "That is all my bum" (33). There is enough of a similarity to *Portrait* that we are meant to compare the two scenes, and enough of a difference to tell us that O'Brien is doing something very different with his "aesthetic theory" passage. He is, of course, making some fun of Joyce and Dedalus, but he's also calling attention to what Joyce does in his aesthetic theory section, and in the process reifying the epigraphic dynamic.

At Swim's aesthetic theory section appears at the beginning of the book rather than the end, which signals that the book is not a *künstlerroman* as *A Portrait of the Artist* is – it doesn't conclude with the development of an artistic sensibility – but that the theories serve as a premise for everything in the book other than the frame tale. The outrageousness of the book's structure draws attention to the theories underlying it, and

thus draw attention to the epigraphic dynamic as a literary device used and usable in other novels as well. *At Swim-Two-Birds* thus changes how we read *Portrait*, but more importantly, it changed how authors writing in its wake conceived of and composed their own novels. *At Swim-Two-Birds* took Joyce's epigraphic character and dropped it like a bomb in the middle of fictional structure. Suddenly, ideas about literature were not required to operate in the background, on the discourse level, and otherwise limit themselves to a few demurrals by a book's narrator or implied author. Suddenly they could become the premise not only for a novel's content, but for its structure as well. By moving the location of the aesthetic theory segment, O'Brien also reifies the reader's instinct to read the book in terms of the epigraphic utterance and reinforces that instinct as a part of the epigraphic dynamic in general. In other words, if one reads *At Swim* and reads *A Portrait* afterwards, one is even more likely to try applying Stephen Dedalus's theories to *Portrait*. O'Brien's work, then, is crucial to the development of the epigraphic character as a literary figure: He reified it by drawing it out of Joyce's work and using it in such an intense, sustained fashion, and he gave it both firmer shape, by reinforcing its self-reflective aspects, and more flexibility, by using it in a more comic context. By basing most of the novel on it, he drew fellow novelists' attention to it, despite the rest of the world's barely knowing the novel even existed – despite the literal bomb that was dropped on it.[71]

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[71] Cronin gives the story: "*At Swim-Two-Birds* had sold 244 copies and it was to sell scarcely any more. In the autumn of 1940 when Longman's premises at St. Paul's Churchyard were destroyed by German incendiary bombing, the remaining stocks were ruined, though a number of sheets survived which were not

If these ideas about literature are the basis of the structural play that makes up the book's logic and comedy, what do we make of how O'Brien presents actual writing, as opposed to simply ideas about it? The book's authors write in several ways, but the narrator's own process is the most realistic:

> I put the letter with care into a pocket at my right buttock and went to the tender trestle of my bed, arranging my back upon it in an indolent horizontal attitude. I closed my eyes, hurting slightly my right stye, and retired into the kingdom of my mind. For a time there was complete darkness and an absence of movement on the part of the cerebral mechanism. The bright square of the window was faintly evidenced at the juncture of my lids. One book, one opening, was a principle with which I did not find it possible to concur. After an interval Finn Mac Cool, a hero of old Ireland, came out before me from his shadow . . . . (15-16)

O'Brien himself has a fascination with earthly details that his narrator seems to disdain: He makes certain to mention the stye, and to discuss the geometrical intricacies of putting a letter into one's pocket and lying down. He is fascinated by such minutiae and the narrative effects they create, in love with a tone that parodies precision, intellect and fussiness. The narrator composes what follows when he lies down; his compositional process works by lying in bed, rather Antaeus-like, and waiting for the "cerebral mechanism" to kick in: the joke being that it's a scientific process, that the writing process is explicable and is not simply a mystery, like the mystery of divine creation. The cinema is implied by the focus on his eye and Finn's emerging from his shadow, by

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yet bound" (99). It is an uncanny bit of the O'Brien biography; one almost imagines Theresa's having gone on to fly for the *Luftwaffe*.

the darkness and the absence of movement suggesting the moments before a film starts, and by the bright square of the window, reminiscent of a movie screen. It is possible that these physical things create the process – that the darkness, the square of light, and the stye's calling attention to his eye prompt his writing process to operate by a cinematic mechanism. He then thinks of his theory, and Finn Mac Cool appears to him, seemingly of his own volition. Thinking of his literary theory seems to prompt his imagination, resulting in Finn Mac Cool's appearance. Read differently, the theory is coincidental and merely precedes, rather than prompts, Finn's appearance. According to this reading, characters act with their own volition. Certainly Finn seems to act independent of the narrator's will – the narrator seems to watch him passively more than write him. This suggests that the author, more than the audience, is in danger of being swept away by the characters. Both possibilities, of character-driven composition and theory-driven composition, are present in this passage, which suggests that the two work in an uneasy tandem.

The earthly aspect of the narrator's writing process at first seems at odds with its meditative qualities, but these seem to work in tandem as well, with even less tension than exists between character-driven and author-driven modes of writing. What looks at first like sloth turns out to be more like meditation and to produce a focus, or at least to restrict attention so that only a few small elements – a window, a stye – can create a reverie that allows a character and a story to grow. There is also a tension between the narrator's withdrawal from the world and the fact that earthly details drive his composition process. All of these tensions are the subject of the whole book, brought to life and exaggerated, literalized as an actual struggle for control between authors and

characters in the narrator's novel about Trellis, as a logical conundrum about the relationship between the material and the imagined worlds, and as a battle between sloth and productivity in both the narrator's biography and his novel. It is a brief moment in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and perhaps the only time that O'Brien allows himself to begin to grow serious. All of the elements of creation that the epigraphic character stirs up in Joyce's work and O'Brien's are present, working in a precarious balance.

Later in the novel, O'Brien tips this balance – for example, when Trellis writes. Writing, for Trellis, encompasses two separate activities: the creation of characters and the direction of action. Trellis creates plot by forcing his characters to act in certain ways. Trellis creates character by two main methods: borrowing them from other works and creating them through "aestho-autogamy," the process through which he creates John Furriskey. There are two levels to the creation by aestho-autogamy. The first we might call literal: we see Trellis writing. "Propped by pillows in his bed in the white light of an incandescent petrol lamp, Dermot Trellis adjusted the pimples in his forehead into a frown of deep creative import. His pencil moved slowly across the ruled paper, leaving words behind it of every size. He was engaged in the creation of John Furriskey, the villain of his tale" (54). In other words, Trellis sits in bed, thinks hard, and writes. The suggestion is that he writes what follows: a press release announcing the "birth" of Furriskey, who is "about five feet eight inches in height, well-built, dark, and clean-shaven" (54). About half a page of such ludicrously precise description follows, none of which has any bearing on the story. The description serves only to reinforce the humor behind presenting a character's creation as a birth and highlighting the differences between birth and the creation of literary characters – namely that, unlike people,

characters come ready-furnished with a past that provides all the relevant details. With people, of course, not all of the details are "relevant," and such is also the case with Furriskey: unlike most characters, he comes with an assortment of random characteristics more suitable to a person, except that these characteristics are a bit too random and factoidal, speaking not to a lived life, but to a more technical creation.

On the next deeper level, the level represented by Trellis's press release, Trellis does not merely write, but creates through aestho-autogamy: He writes about creating John Furriskey – the sort of self-reflexive writing that is often called masturbatory. Autogamy, in reference to flowers, is self-fertilization, so aestho-autogamy is literally artistic self-fertilization, although the press release Trellis writes claims aestho-autogamy is "an operation involving neither fertilization nor conception" (55). The joke, at any rate, is clear: aestho-autogamy is creation of a character through mental masturbation. The entire passage on Furriskey's creation becomes a tour de force in sophomoric humor as a result, including Trellis's being in bed, his making a face during Furriskey's creation, his "zeal and perseverance" and his "international repute in connection with his researches" (55), which essentially make him a world-renowned wanker. In light of the idea of aestho-autogamy, every mention of a writer's being in bed in *At Swim-Two-Birds* takes on this masturbatory meaning in addition to whatever other meanings, like sloth and laziness, it might already have. O'Brien also uses it as a jumping off point for making other sexual jokes as well: "Aestho-autogamy with one unknown quantity on the male side, Mr. Trellis told me in conversation, has long been a commonplace. For fully five centuries in all parts of the world epileptic slavies have been pleading it in extenuation of uncalled-for fecundity. It is a very familiar phenomenon in literature" (55). In other

words, unmarried women who become pregnant claiming not to have had sexual intercourse are corollaries to Trellis as literary creator of John Furriskey. Beyond the sexual joke, however, O'Brien is also speaking about virgin births and Christ's conception. "An operation involving neither fertilization nor conception" is a pretty good match for the Incarnation. The "mysterious abstraction . . . of the paternal factor in the commonplace case of unexplained maternity" becomes not just a joke about unnamed fathers but a reference to religious mysteries. In this way, the author is godlike, both in creating beings through quasi-sexual means and in controlling their actions.

The idea of the partially fictional also relates to ideas about creation in the book. In the real world, of course, we know that people are created through sexual reproduction. But fictional characters are not, unless an author like O'Brien decides to treat characters-as-signified as actors – themselves real people – instead. And then we get the wonderfully complicated and untenable ideas that govern the creation and ontological status of characters in the narrator's novel within *At Swim*. Thus we have birth announcements for characters "born" at the age of twenty-five and the process of aestho-autogamy that gives rise to such births, as well as procreation between fictional and "nonfictional" characters and the "constructional or argumentative difficulty" posed by the "quasi-illusory type" (206):

> The task of rendering and describing the birth of Mr. Trellis's illegitimate offspring I found one fraught with obstacles . . . so much so, in fact, that I found it entirely beyond my powers. . . . I had carefully considered giving an outward indication of the son's semi-humanity by furnishing him with only the half of a body. Here I encountered further difficulties. If given the upper half only, it

> would be necessary to provide a sedan-chair or litter with at least two runners or scullion-boys to operate it. . . . On the other hand, to provide merely the lower half, *videlicet*, the legs and lumbar region, would be to narrow unduly the validity of the son and confine his activities virtually to walking, running, kneeling and kicking football. For that reason I decided ultimately to make no distinction and thus avoided any charge that my work was somewhat farfetched. (206-207)

Probably the most important phrase in this passage is the repeated "the son," for by using this phrase instead of referring to Orlick Trellis by name, O'Brien highlights the episode's parody of the nature of Christ, specifically his ontological status. Beyond the silliness that the idea of half a body inspires, this passages moves the discussion of writerly creation from jokes about sex and masturbation to serious questions about the nature of writerly creation. How exactly does the writer create? If the creation isn't sexual, is it somehow god-like? Do characters have free will? If the idea of giving characters a decent standard of living results in the narrator's presenting characters-as signifieds as actors, then the idea of aestho-autogamy results in the narrator's presenting characters-as-signified as real people – people born through sexual means, not created through aestho-autogamy or some other writerly form of creation.

Literary creation in *At Swim-Two-Birds* largely mimics the narrator's theories. Characters are drawn from other works, fictional or actual, and this, of course, depends on the narrator's theory of the modern novel as a work of reference. Aestho-autogamy depends on the boundary crossing enabled by the destruction of the fourth wall and the collapsing of the actor with the character that the narrator's theory enables. Indeed, the entire plot of the narrator's novel depends on the leveling of the boundary between Trellis

and his characters as well as on the notion of the character as social being – the leveling of the boundary between character-as-signifier and character-as-signified. *At Swim-Two-Birds*, then, is largely a demonstration of the narrator's theories in action.

The main exception to literary creation's mimicking the narrator's theories is reality's being a part of the narrator's writing process. The bed and withdrawal from the world are necessary ingredients, but small intrusions of reality are necessary as well, though not always productive for the narrator, as with his dental pain. His uncle's demands are both productive for and frustrating to the narrator's writing process, creating a tension that helps to fuel his writing. When this tension is resolved, the writing comes to an end. We have seen how this is not the end of *At Swim-Two-Birds* itself, as the *bildungsroman* readings would have it, but it is the end of the narrator's writing. *At Swim-Two-Birds* is larger than the narrator's novel, larger even than a demonstration of the narrator's theories. It can, I think, most profitably be thought of as the interaction of the narrator's novel, the frame tale and the discourse level of the novel – the interaction between the two and the various other ways O'Brien guides us or loses us through the labyrinths of his creation.

There are other kinds of writing in *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Orlick Trellis's methodical approach and Furriskey's, Shanahan's, and Lamont's more haphazard, violent approach both come readily to mind. The biggest ideas about writing, however, are included in the narrator's and Trellis's approaches; what's left after those are simpler bits of parody. The primary tensions involved in writing – between sloth and activity, sexuality and asexual divine creation, withdrawal and engagement, the author's godlike control and the character's free will, the material world and the imagined world – all of

these are encompassed by the narrator and Trellis, their ideas about writing, and the ways they write. Joyce, too, brings all of these elements to the fore. Along with the structural and rhetorical play that make up the epigraphic dynamic, these tensions define the epigraphic character. And that is largely O'Brien's doing. It was his genius to notice what Joyce was doing, to imagine the possibilities inherent in the work of Joyce, Brecht, and Eliot, among others, to twist those possibilities just far enough that they warped but did not break, and to see the whole experiment through to the end – or lack thereof.

CHAPTER FOUR

Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* and the God of Narrative Structure

Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

–William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, at first glance, seems to have little in common with James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* or Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and might seem not to belong in a monograph on the epigraphic character. Its formal experiments are less flashy than those of *A Portrait* or *At Swim*; its metafiction is much quieter. Readers often think of it as a fairly conventional novel: it tells a story in a straightforward, easily naturalized style. They forget that there's a writer in it. Bendrix writes about writing differently than Stephen Dedalus and the narrator of *At Swim* do: They draw attention to what they're doing; Bendrix offers his thoughts as part of the story. Greene, unlike Joyce and O'Brien, was writing as a seasoned writer, one who was, in Lodge's terminology "antimodernist" – that is, his writing "continues the tradition modernism reacted against" (*After Bakhtin* 6). But Greene had a particular vision of how he wanted to shape the English novel, and saw in Joyce's and O'Brien's work the tool he needed to enact this change: the epigraphic character. Joyce and O'Brien were writing their first novels when using the epigraphic character. Greene wrote as an established writer. Greene's novel wove the epigraphic aspects of the character more firmly into the novel: Maurice Bendrix thinks about literature throughout the novel, and his ideas about literature are for that reason often more difficult to pick out – they seem much more

natural, and are always highly contextual, depending for their full resonance on all aspects of the text around them, both immediate and as a whole. As a conventional novelist, he was perfectly poised to bring the epigraphic novel into the next era of novelistic form.

Greene engages the epigraphic character along many of the same lines as Joyce – religion, sex, and the relationship between the numinous abstract and the sensual concrete are all key aspects of their use of the epigraphic character. Greene, however, used the epigraphic character post-O'Brien, and so was able to incorporate many of O'Brien's changes into the figure. Greene also used the epigraphic character to different ends. Joyce used the epigraphic character to navigate his work-life balance, his relationship to codified theories of aesthetics versus a quickened fiction and an ardent life, and O'Brien used the epigraphic character to build a logic that provided both the content and the scaffolding for his first novel, as well as to lampoon Joyce. Greene, however, uses the epigraphic character to reenact, on the discourse level of the novel, Bendrix's struggle with God; to entice readers into a spiritual struggle; and to mark out the terms of that struggle according to his own heterodox theology, which finds its structure in narrative form. In the process, he engages both O'Brien and Joyce. While his engagement of O'Brien is more neutrally referential and largely about borrowing and adapting his enlarged structure of the epigraphic character, Greene's engagement of Joyce is more aggressive and thorough.

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A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and *At Swim-Two-Birds* – the book that established the figure and the book that reified it – were the two primary epigraphic novels at the time Greene wrote *The End of the Affair*. We find in Greene the heir-apparent to the epigraphic character. *At Swim-Two-Birds* has only become moderately well-known since its republication in 1960; even in literary circles it was a cult classic: until 1950 only two hundred forty copies had been sold, the rest of the first printing having been destroyed when a bomb fell on the warehouse in which they were stored (Cronin 211, 99, 171). But Greene, as a reader for Longman's, read and recommended Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* for publication. His report was so enthusiastic that it provides one of the enduring back-cover blurbs for the novel: "it is a book in a thousand . . . in the line of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*." The book's metafictional qualities, in particular, impressed Greene: The reader's report read, at more length,

> I read it with continual excitement, amusement and the kind of glee one experiences when people smash china on the stage. . . . its amazing spirits do not disguise the seriousness of the attempt to present, simultaneously as it were, all the literary traditions of Ireland. . . . We have had books inside books before now, and characters who are given life outside their fiction, but O'Nolan takes Pirandello and Gide a long way further. (qtd. in O'Brien, *Reader* 2)

Greene thought highly of O'Brien, and when O'Brien sent him a copy of *The Hard Life*, wrote to him, "I was delighted this morning to receive a copy of THE HARD LIFE from your publishers and to find it dedicated to me. I'm a proud man! AT SWIM TWO BIRDS has remained to my mind ever since it first appeared one of the best books of our century" (*Graham Greene: A Life* 257). The two writers do not seem, at first glance, as if

they have much in common, but Greene's esteem for O'Brien runs deep. Certainly, Greene saw in O'Brien someone else who felt less than adulatory towards Joyce, and this would have made the connections among O'Brien's novel, Joyce and the epigraphic character stand out more prominently to Greene. But that's not quite enough to explain Greene's esteeming *At Swim* so highly. It is, I believe, Greene's dedication to craft that explains his enthusiasm. From O'Brien, Greene gets the conceptual architecture for *The End of the Affair*: the world-within-a-world, the metaphor of the author as a god. Greene literalizes this, opting to place the question of the author's/God's control over the plot and characters not only on the discourse level, in Bendrix's statements about writing, but more thoroughly on the thematic and implied levels of the novel. Moreover, the opening of *The End of the Affair*, with all its depth, is also a wink at the opening of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Greene brings out the theological implications of O'Brien's structural play with beginnings and endings, circularity and unity; it's possible that Greene, in one of his more intensely religious periods, connected the structural aspects of *At Swim* with the religious elements so deeply woven into that novel. It is possible, also, that Greene though of himself as writing a "despotic" novel – the sort O'Brien's narrator warns the reader against. In Greene's hands, O'Brien's giddy logic is transformed into religious paradox.

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Maurice Bendrix's name is a reference, but what it refers to is something of a mystery. *Bendrix* is straightforward enough: it refers to Benzedrine, the drug that Greene took while trying to speed through the writing of some of his novels (Lodge, "Lives" 47).

Maurice is a literary reference, according to Bendrix himself: "I am a man for some reason known by his surname – I might never have been christened for all the use my friends make of the rather affected Maurice my literary parents gave me" (9). It is difficult to discern exactly how "Maurice" is literary or affected, and difficult to decide what to make of his deliberately telling us it's literary and affected, despite the name's being used so infrequently in the novel. The most obvious source is St. Maurice, featured in both Gibbons's *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* and the hagiographical collection *The Golden Legend*. Bendrix notes that Henry has a set of Gibbon in his study, which he "doubted . . . had been opened" (13). St. Maurice would be a doubly ironic source, since he was martyred for his dedication to the Christian God and was a soldier, two things Bendrix is not. But the referent that fits best comes from Joyce's work: Maurice is the name of Stephen Dedalus's younger brother.[72]

This wisp of a reference to Joyce, when connected with other wisps and hints, grows into something more substantial, but still somewhat less than solid. To name them hints briefly: Both novels use journals in key places to signify something: *Portrait* culminates in Stephen's journal; *The End of the Affair* centers on Sarah's. Women's writing, placed in key locations, is important to both *Ulysses* and *The End of the Affair*: *Ulysses* ends with Molly's soliloquy, which gives us a different perspective on many events and assumptions in the novel, and *The End of the Affair* centers on Sarah's journal – her words, her consciousness, her history – which changes both Bendrix's and our understanding of Sarah's character and the events of the novel until that point, and introduces much of the overtly theological material. Arguably, neither Dedalus nor

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[72] Maurice is mentioned only briefly in *A Portrait*, in passing, when Stephen's parents are speaking about the arrangements to send one or both boys to Belvedere College instead of to the Christian Brothers (71-

Bendrix chooses the beginning of his tale: *The End of the Affair* begins by questioning who chose the novel's beginning; *Portrait* begins with Stephen's listening to and repeating other people's words and narratives of his life. And the date June 16 is profoundly important to both *Ulysses* and *The End of the Affair*, as this chapter will demonstrate. Peter Rabinowitz calls such "references that aren't concretely there, yet that seem to haunt the work we're reading" (245) "ghost references":

> Ghost references are not simply "implicit" references: many references, although implicit, are so unambiguous that the authorial audience doesn't stumble. When an institutionalized young woman says to her lover, "I'm only a wild girl with dirty hair whom you keep locked in your attic" (Salamanca 241), there's little question that this is intended as a reference to *Jane Eyre*. Nor are ghost references simply obscure references: some references, while far from obvious, flavor a moment in the work without haunting it. The brief exchange about cucumbers in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* is a faint nod to Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but it has no real aura. Ghost references, in contrast, make a significant difference in our fundamental interpretation of the text; when we come upon them, we feel . . . chilled by an eerie sense of some ambiguous secret narrative behind the one we're reading. (245-246)

In showing a literary example of a ghost reference[73], Rabinowitz gives "a series of points of contact between the two, a series of parallels that are striking and tantalizing, and that, once you see them, are hard to forget" (248). Greene gives us enough "points of contact" between *The End of the Affair* and Joyce's works that we "can't escape the eerie feeling

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72). The name is used more frequently in *Stephen Hero*.

that" *The End of the Affair* "is haunted by" Joyce's work "in a way that should influence our reading strategies" (248). Although "the secret narrative" this ghost reference haunts us with is deeply ambiguous, I'd like to offer some tentative suggestions about what they might be trying to tell us, though the main thrust of the references will become clearer at the end of this chapter.

Greene's relationship to Joyce is complex. Greene once wrote to Catherine Walston "I'm better than Maurice you know! Today I read an article which said 'unlike such writers as James Joyce & Graham Greene' – damn you, I'm not played out yet" (*Life* 147; Letter Sep. 30 [1947]).[74] Such a reference speaks to what Joyce meant to Greene being an longstanding and complex issue: Greene implies that he's better than Joyce, that to be lumped together in the same category is somehow insulting, that he feels that he is seen as a lesser version of Joyce – a younger brother, a Stanislaus, a Maurice. The letter, unfortunately, gives little context for the comment, which was tacked on as a postscript to a more personal letter to Walston. It does, however, shore up the suspicion that "Maurice" refers us to Joyce's work – to Greene, *Maurice* was shorthand for "Joyce's little brother."[75]

The interruption of the more conventionally narrated text of *The End of the Affair* with Sarah's journal situates it in relation to Joyce's work. Both Joyce and Greene place semantic weight on the location of these journal entries in their novels. *A Portrait of the*

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[73] I debated giving the titles of the books, but the example Rabinowitz uses and the way he lays it out for us is so neat that you simply must look at the article yourself.

[74] As published in *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters*, "Mauriac [?]" is in the place of Maurice; however, the manuscript reads "Maurice," a name which understandably did not make sense to the editor, who likely took it for poor penmanship.

[75] Similarly, Henry might point towards Henry Flowers, the alter ego of Leopold Bloom, whose wife also has an affair. There are other likely references for Henry, however. Sarah's name refers to the biblical Sarah (Sarai) of Genesis 12:11-20, whose husband Abram offered her to foreign kings to smooth his passage into their countries.

Artist as a Young Man is about writing, if we take it broadly. It begins with Simon Dedalus's song and ends with Stephen Dedalus's journal as the culmination of the *künstlerroman*. Stephen moves from another's language about himself to his own writing about himself. His journal is inherently solipsistic: the artwork, the writing, creates and becomes the self, even eventually the nation, as he strives to "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (253). Stephen Dedalus builds up his ability to use and master language, to express and define himself in ways increasingly distant from others' stories and definitions of him. Though he is never fully shed of others' stories, and never fully masters his own skills, the direction he moves in is clear.

In Greene's *The End of the Affair*, Sarah's journal is the only significant stylistic change from Bendrix's dominant, largely chronological[76] tale, and it is the third book of five: the center of the novel. The story of Maurice Bendrix's life, therefore, centers on another's writing. In telling this story, he wonders whether he has any choice in the shaping of it:

> do I in fact choose of my own will *choose* that black wet January night on the Common, in 1946, the sight of Henry Miles slanting across the wide river of rain, or did these images choose me. . . . if I had believed then in a God, I could also have believed in a hand, plucking at my elbow, a suggestion, "Speak to him: he hasn't seen you yet." (7)

While Sarah is at the center of his story, the story begins and ends with Bendrix, God and Henry: love is at the center of this story, but the context is suffering and compassion. It is a story that depends on what others, both human and divine, have created for him. And unlike both *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the book is not relentlessly chronological, but rather

weaves the story of the writing in with the stories about the affair, the quest to discover Sarah's mystery lover, and her death: a tapestry is created that shows these events operate in a different kind of time.

The date the affair ends similarly situates *The End of the Affair* in relation to Joyce's writing. On June 17, 1944, Sarah writes "Yesterday I went home with him and we did the usual things. I haven't the nerve to put them down, but I'd like to, because now when I'm writing it's already tomorrow and I'm afraid of getting to the end of yesterday. As long as I go on writing, yesterday is today and we are still together" (92). It is June 16, then, when the V-1 rocket explodes and Bendrix either dies or loses consciousness; when Sarah prays for his life and makes a promise with God she feels compelled to keep. It is June 16 – Bloomsday – when the affair ends. This is not arbitrary, but purposeful: although Bendrix tells us, "It was the first night of what were later called the V1s in June 1944," the first night of the V-1s was actually June 13, 1944 (Price 978). Greene moves the date three days into the future to coincide with Bloomsday. An early draft of *The End of the Affair* shows that Greene put a lot of effort into the organization of book three and paid close attention to those dates: he made a separate list of the dates of Sarah's journal entries ("Point" note) and, in an early typescript of the novel, moved the date of the entry about the end of the affair from June 17 to 15 and back again ("Point" TMS Book III, 137), suggesting he was trying to get the date for "yesterday" on the correct side of Bloomsday. In a later typescript, this date is one of only three dates changed ("Point" Typed MSS). [77] While Joyce used June 16 to make a declaration about the centrality of love, Greene uses it to make a declaration

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[76] See Creese. Despite the flashbacks, each separate time of the tale is told in order.

about the centrality of passion in the fullest sense of that word: about a depth of emotion that encompasses not only romantic and sexual passion, but suffering and devotion as well. In this way, Greene paradoxically brings us closer to the implicit aesthetics in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as revealed by the close reading in chapter one of this dissertation.

Greene buried these references to Joyce because Joyce shines too brightly for anyone to be compared with him – he swallows them up, and it becomes difficult for any author to get credit for originality; the focus shifts stubbornly to the comparison with the master. This is a difficult line to walk: the risk of being lumped in with Joyce simply because one uses the same terms, which Joyce has already defined, is both great and enormously frustrating. But one must remember that Joyce, too, had little control over readers' understanding of his terms as he wanted: It is tempting to read his efforts to guide readers – the leaked schema, the control over biographies and critical collections[78]– as his being overly controlling, but if we turn the coin over, we see an author desperately engaged in a bootless effort to be understood. More to the point, with slender evidence from Greene, it becomes difficult to figure out whether he, like Stanislaus, cleaves to Joyce but diverges in some small important ways, or whether Greene saw himself in more profoundly different terms. I argue in this chapter that Greene works with many of the same concepts Joyce did, but sees their meaning in profoundly different ways.

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[77] One other is the entry directly prior; the date of that entry would depend on getting the date for this entry correct (125). The other date was VE day (154).

[78] See Whittier-Ferguson.

Unlike the epigraphic utterances in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the epigraphic utterances in *The End of the Affair* do not call attention to themselves. They are remarkably frequent and remarkably brief. They cover many topics, and so do not seem to push a particular agenda. They are down-to-earth, not fantastical, like O'Brien's, or especially philosophical or academic, like Joyce's. For all these reasons, they do not stick out, but disappear into the fabric of the book. They do not take place in a conversation with an interlocutor; Bendrix is not a student, and he is not trying to convince a friend of anything. There is no dialogue to read them against, though the God of the text[79] becomes a silent but active interlocutor who challenges everything Bendrix knows about writing. Instead, Bendrix often seems to be simply explaining things about writing as part of the normal course of narrating a novel. As a writer, he sees the world in terms of writing, and so often uses writing as a metaphor, especially for religious experiences. The epigraphic utterances in *The End of the Affair* are thus remarkably integrated with the themes, characters, and events of the novel.

Because the epigraphic utterances are so integrated in *The End of the Affair* and Bendrix's writing is so much a part of his life that what he says about it seems off-the-cuff, of a piece with the rest of what he writes, readers do not tend to group him with Stephen Dedalus or the narrator of *At Swim*. Bendrix's thoughts on writing do not stand out as a grand theory of literature. They are not presented as a whole. In fact, his thoughts on writing are often downright prosaic and practical:

> When young one builds up habits of work that one believes will last a lifetime and withstand any catastrophe. Over twenty years I have probably averaged five

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[79] This dissertation behaves as if there is a God in the text, but leaves the question of God outside of the text alone, except for the purposes of using theology to interpret the text. God exists at least as a

> hundred words a day for five days a week. I can produce a novel in a year, and that allows time for revision and the correction of the typescript. I have always been very methodical and when my quota of work is done, I break off even in the middle of a scene. Every now and then during the morning's work I count what I have done and mark off the hundreds on my manuscript. No printer need make a careful cast-off of my work, for there on the front page of my typescript is marked the figure – 83,764. (34)

These remarks mostly tell us about Bendrix's character, making him look like a wet sock, and maybe tell us about the kind of discipline that is necessary to writers, which is not necessarily something readers care about. Here Bendrix portrays himself as downright boring. Breaking off writing in the middle of a scene is blasphemy to those readers who would stay up all night to finish the latest Greene novel – blasphemy to those critics who proclaim a work "un-put-downable." He treats words as objects to be counted, as though he's totting up the day's sales. And he has done this for twenty years. Many of us are not open to such remarks, preferring the more romantic view of the writer presented in the rest of the novel: the writer loves and suffers and absolutely cannot write.[80] These prosaic ideas about writing do not seem important as ideas about literature because they do not seem sufficiently philosophical or deep. But they speak to Bendrix's experience and authority on ideas about literature.

Greene weaves such practical concerns with writing into several aspects of the novel. As part of the plot, practical concerns about writing prompt Bendrix to seek Sarah

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character/implied arranger in the novel.

[80] Neil Jordan's portrayal of Bendrix, in the opening scene of the 1999 film, fits the bill: Bendrix drinks whiskey and types "This is a diary of hate." The switch from "story" to "diary" makes the writing a personal, not a professional, piece, but the whiskey clinches the portrait.

out in the first place: "I doubt whether I should ever have troubled to know Henry or Sarah well," Bendrix tells us,

> if I had not begun in 1939 to write a story with a senior civil servant as the main character. Henry James once, in a discussion with Walter Besant, said that a young woman with sufficient talent need only pass the mess-room windows of a Guards' barracks and look inside in order to write a novel about the Brigade, but I think at some stage of her book she would have found it necessary to go to bed with a Guardsman if only in order to check on the details. I didn't exactly go to bed with Henry, but I did the next best thing, and the first night I took Sarah out to dinner I had the cold-blooded intention of picking the brain of a civil servant's wife. (10)

Greene is deft: The overt goal of the passage is to tell us about how the affair began, yet he manages to tell us also about his character, tell us something about writing, and give us the hint that Henry James's thoughts on writing might be important. Greene's writing is rich and layered. The layering puts us at ease: the thoughts on writing do not call attention to themselves, and we have the option of not noticing them as thoughts about writing – such epigraphic moments as these might simply register as part of the plot. We can choose which layer to focus on or allow ourselves to become absorbed in. We are allowed to sink into the story without noticing these epigraphic utterances at all. Yet they are incessant, one of the novel's keynotes.

Greene weaves discussion of writing into Bendrix's narrative of how he carried out the affair with Sarah:

> When I was young not even a love affair would alter my schedule. A love affair had to begin after lunch, and however late I might be in getting to bed – so long as I slept in my own bed – I would read the morning's work over and sleep on it. Even the war hardly affected me. . . . It needed Sarah to upset my self-imposed discipline. The bombs between those first daylight raids and the V1s of 1944 kept their own convenient nocturnal habits, but so often it was only in the mornings that I could see Sarah, for in the afternoon she was never quite secure from friends, who, their shopping done, would want company and gossip before the evening siren. Sometimes she would come in between two queues, and we would make love between the greengrocer's and the butcher's. (34)

He weaves the remarks about writing into the narration of the affair, but the reverse is true as well: the discussion of the affair is embedded in a longer piece that centers on writing. We see the anguished lover rather than the blocked writer, but nonetheless the passage deals, beginning and end, with Bendrix as writer; the affair is an aside. Yet the affair, because it is so moving and draws the reader in – because it appeals to pathos – overshadows the discussion of writing. These kinds of remarks on writing are not only practical but also habitual – since they have to do with the habits that surround the practice of writing. Bendrix speaks of schedules, but what he describes is more involved, more of a ritual. Elsewhere, when faced with the possibility of a private detective coming to his flat, Bendrix tells us "I have a passion for writing on clean single-lined foolscap: a smear, a tea-mark, on a page makes it unusable, and a fantastic notion took me that I must keep my paper locked up in case of an unsavoury visitor" (23). Even such a brief remark tells us about more than just Bendrix's writing habits; here it speaks to

something deep in the relation of writing and the affair, writing and purity. For Bendrix, writing is a thing apart, not deeply or consciously linked with his life. It is relegated to the mornings, the moments just before bed, his sleeping mind, and his locked-up, clean, single-lined foolscap. The novel is as much about the affair's disrupting his writing as it is about the affair itself: "all that time," he tells us, "I couldn't work" (35).

All kinds of epigraphic utterances are important aspects of the epigraphic character: The epigraphic character, as I've tried to suggest earlier, does not merely express theories about literature and writing, but is also fully a character in his or her own right. This is part of what distinguishes epigraphic novels from metafictions: the epigraphic character has his or her foot in both worlds. That it is so easy to forget that Bendrix is a writer and to see him primarily as a lover or a man in the middle of a spiritual crisis speaks to Greene's superior skill in blending these aspects of the epigraphic character into a cohesive whole. Much as O'Brien's achievement was to reify the epigraphic character, Greene's achievement was to show that the epigraphic character is not inherently metafictional. *The End of the Affair* is decidedly a realist novel. Greene uses the hierarchical fictional structures that the epigraphic character brings to conventional fiction to raise metaphysical, not metafictional, concerns. In doing so, he also lays the groundwork for an analysis of how fiction and metafiction work together. He emphasizes the more conventional aspects of Bendrix as epigraphic character and blends his epigraphic utterances almost seamlessly with his characterization. Greene was able to do this because he was an established writer. Unlike Joyce, he was not working out his beliefs about literature or the foundational values of his life: those were much

more established in Greene. Greene, then, could and did speak with the force and ease of experience.

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Greene brings Bendrix's epigraphic utterances to bear on every aspect of narrative. We can use Seymour Chatman's outline of narrative structure in *Story and Discourse* as a yardstick here. In the many epigraphic utterances Bendrix makes about writing, he manages to cover all aspects of narrative form Chatman outlines. Bendrix's statements on writing often focus on craft, right from the novel's opening:

> A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. I say 'one chooses' with the inaccurate pride of a professional writer who – when he has been seriously noted at all – has been praised for his technical ability, but do I in fact of my own will *choose* that black wet January night on the Common, in 1946, the sight of Henry Miles slanting across the wide river of rain, or did these images choose me? It is convenient, it is correct according to the rules of my craft to begin just here, but if I had believed then in a god, I could also have believed in a hand, plucking at my elbow, a suggestion, 'Speak to him: he hasn't seen you yet' (7).

Greene lets the story overpower the epigraphic moment: He tantalizes us with the idea of a god, a disembodied hand, the haunting notion that we may not have free will, and the mystery of who Henry Miles is. We begin *in media res*, and the mysteries this prompts overshadow the comments about writing. Readers tend to privilege plot and curiosity:

they want to know what happens next , or, in this case, what's going on now. There is enough plot and character here for readers to immediately naturalize the comments about writing as part of Bendrix's character and reflective of the religious and supernatural themes of the novel. The epigraphic utterances do exist, however, and with a particular set of foci. Here, they revolve around the writer's craft – "professional writer," "technical ability," "correct according to the rules of my craft" – and on the ordering of the memoir's[81] events – one of the terms in Chatman's schema. Bendrix weighs carefully the ordering of events in writing the story: "beginning or end," "that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead." The ordering of events is central to both the writer's craft and the writer's control over his material.

What threatens to subvert Bendrix's control over the ordering of events in his memoir is not exactly something else exerting power over this ordering, but *images*. We are in the realm of Bendrix's unconscious, "the underwater caverns" (35) as he later calls them: "So much of a novelist's writing, as I have said, takes place in the unconscious: in those depths the last word is written before the first word appears on paper. We remember the details of our story, we do not invent them" (35). But, as we shall see later, these caverns are not exactly under Bendrix's control, either.

Tone, another of Chatman's terms – "This is a novel of hate" (7) – frames Bendrix's memoir to a particularly interesting end – it is the one thing that he feels he can control, in a narrative that he suspects is largely created by God. To give up on this last handhold would be to accept God – or "let God win," as Bendrix might phrase it. But though the hate is there, what really stands out is not the hate Bendrix feels as he's

[81] I use the term *memoir* to differentiate what Bendrix writes from what we read: We are reading a novel by Greene, in which Bendrix writes a memoir. To say Bendrix writes a novel or this novel would be grossly

writing, but the compassion he feels, as a character in the story, for Henry. Again, the epigraphic character is always a character, and his epigraphic qualities most often work surreptitiously. Story takes the fore; meditations on writing, especially when kept brief, casual, and interspersed with a particularly sensational love story, move to the background.

Bendrix meditates on the selection of details as well as the ordering of events. Again, the meditation is embedded in his investment in the novel's story and themes, and so does not call attention to itself:

> a detective must find it as important as a novelist to amass his trivial material before picking out the right clue. But how difficult that picking out is – the release of the real subject. The enormous pressure of the outside world weighs on us like a *peine forte et dure*. Now that I come to write my own story the problem is still the same, but worse – there are so many more facts, now that I have not to invent them. How can I disinter the human character from the heavy scene – the daily newspaper, the daily meal, the traffic grinding towards Battersea, the gulls coming up from the Thames looking for bread, and the early summer of 1939 glinting on the park where the children sailed their boats – one of those bright condemned pre-war summers? I wondered whether, if I thought long enough, I could detect, at the party Henry had given, her future lover. (25)

This is deft exposition: Greene paints the scene for us and masks it as "the heavy scene" from which to pick out the relevant details. We get a representation of the scene from which he chooses only the precisely correct details, but it's made up only of those correct details themselves, which is a logical impossibility. In excerpt, this epigraphic moment

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inaccurate.

seems especially focused on writing, but we can see in the beginning and ending that it functions as a transition from the previous episode at the Savage Detective Agency and the following recollection of the party at which Bendrix first meets Sarah and Henry. Every epigraphic moment in the novel serves multiple functions. The epigraphic moments often recede into the background by serving two or more functions; in this way, they help to create a layered structure, which, as I've suggested above, is not always logically possible in the real world. At times, a term is both one thing and another, both the heavy scene in which the real subject is buried and the real subject itself. The resulting structure is an illusion: as with a drawing by M. C. Escher, the entire structure shifts depending on how you look at it; the dimensions, which seem to be three or more, are revealed when they don't quite work right to be made up from two dimensions only.

Sometimes these epigraphic moments shade aspects of Bendrix's character, or highlight themes of the novel. When Bendrix tries to describe Sarah to us, as the official introduction of her character, his meditation on the problems inherent in selection becomes the widely shared difficulty of remembering a loved one who has died. "How," he wonders, "can I make a stranger see her as she stopped in the hall at the foot of the stairs and turned to us?"

> I have never been able to describe even my fictitious characters except by their actions. It has always seemed to me that in a novel the reader should be allowed to imagine a character in any way he chooses: I do not want to supply him with ready-made illustrations. Now I am betrayed by my own technique, for I do not want any other woman substituted for Sarah, I want the reader to see the one broad forehead and bold mouth, the conformation of the skull, but all I can

> convey is an indeterminate figure turning in the dripping macintosh,[82] saying, 'Yes, Henry?' and then, 'You?' (18)

Again, as Bendrix meditates on selection as a part of his craft, he bumps up against a logical impossibility and finds his way out through a twisted logic: he says he can only convey an indeterminate figure, and yet we get at least a small description: "the one broad forehead and bold mouth, the conformation of the forehead." This last is a bizarre term which seems to come from anthropology: it can be found in the "Anthropology" entry in the Eleventh *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, an edition famous for the number of entries by a great number of well-known and well-respected contributors, including Edward Burnett Tylor, a founding scholar in the discipline of anthropology, who wrote the entry. Published in 1910-1911, the encyclopedia would have been kept to hand in the British Museum as in many libraries, and so available to Greene, though ideas about skull shape as a signifier of race would have been all too plentiful around the time when the book was written. Tylor writes that "The conformation of the skull is second only to the colour of the skin as a criterion for the distinction of race" (113). Whether Greene meant to imply something about Sarah's not being Caucasian is unclear; there's scant evidence to go on, although what we do have hits some of the major markers that Tylor wrote about: lips, hair – Sarah's hair is "brown indeterminate-coloured," but "tough and knotty" (49,131) – conformation of the skull. It is possible this is a nod to Catherine Walston's American roots, or a way to align Sarah further with the Jewish Sarah of the Old

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[82] The macintosh possibly refers to Joyce: in *Ulysses*, an unidentified person in a macintosh attends Dignam's funeral, and is written into the list of attendants as Mr. MacIntosh. He comes to stand for those things that are not properly unaccounted for, unknown – mistakes that creep into writing, things that have been left out. This suggests that Joyce has not accounted for the kind of love Sarah represents in his tribute to love. Sarah also point to "that third," the party that, like MacIntosh, is present but unknown: God.

Testament, whose husband Abraham encouraged the Pharaoh to take her as a wife (Genesis 12).

Why does Greene write Bendrix meditating on each element of the novel's discourse only to bury that meditation in the story itself? Of the three novels treated by this dissertation, *The End of the Affair* is at once the most epigraphic and the least. Bendrix writes about writing and literature much more often than Stephen Dedalus or the narrator of *At Swim* does – and yet his epigraphic thoughts so easily go unnoticed, brushed over as just another part of a good story. But they are inextricably bound with the juicier elements of that story, with sex and death and God. At the same time, they provide a hierarchical structure that the story's most interesting events depend upon for their meaning. An epigraphic character, like a narrator, instantly provides another level of mediation to the story – the one in which the story is talked about being hierarchically superior to the story level. But for every element of craft Bendrix covers, he posits or illustrates God's working on that level in a writerly way as well. The structure of *The End of the Affair* thus has a third, "God" level, above the narrator's epigraphic character. Readers sometimes mistake this third "God" level for reality. Reality is normally the third level – the level on which the author and the reader actually exist; this is part of the confusion.

Another part is that God is not explicitly named as a character from the beginning of the novel; instead, we hear of "that third" (7), "that other whom Parkis was so maladroitly pursuing" (54), "you" (53 and book two), and later "You" (book three). So we are tricked into believing that whoever this third character is, he is real in the same way that Sarah and Parkis are real, and that is how we begin to shape our attitude toward

him. We assume he is there, that he is a character – we assume his existence. And when we find who the mystery man is, he is someone we are used to thinking of as possibly real. Had Greene introduced, say, O'Brien's Pooka in this part, or Ganesha, we, or non-Hindi readers at any rate, would be in the territory of magic realism. It's the same mechanism, the same thing, only Western readers are more likely to credit God as real. Greene uses our predisposition towards this particular belief and our normal understanding of fictional structure to trick us into treating this character as real. And the slow reveal that enacts this effect is the same slow reveal that builds the operations of God up from possibilities to coincidences to "that foolish newspaper word that was the alternative to 'coincidence'" (188-189), miracles – things that can't be real, but are. We are supposedly left to our own senses to decide whether they are really coincidences or not, but unlike the real world, the world of *The End of the Affair* has a God level built in. To call it coincidence here is to read against the text (Paguaga). It is merely to call God by another name, not to deny his existence. So far as the novel goes, then, God exists; the question is whether this third, "God" level of the novel coincides with the usual third "reality" level. This is not a question we usually ask at the end of a bodice-ripper or a mystery novel. Greene has tricked us.

With these three levels, Greene is able to create an O'Brienesque logical puzzle without O'Brien's typical "wrong conclusions" (Kenner) to tip us off that something is wrong; the only "wrong conclusion" is the possibility that some readers would not concede – that God exists in reality – and one that they are in the habit of willingly suspending: that what they read is not real in some way and works in the same way reality does. From a strictly logical point of view, we cannot be sure of a "right

conclusion" either; whenever the existence of God is argued, one can only be sure that, in the end, there is no proving something non-rational. God's existence is strictly outside the scope of argument. It is not, however, outside the scope of a good story or the clever craft of fiction as wielded by deft hands. Neither of those can prove a thing, but they can, in their own peculiar ways, be very convincing.

Greene was invested in restoring craft to the realist novel. He was not invested in modernist pyrotechnics or experimentalism for its own sake; he was clever about using the elements of craft in tandem with and in service to his story. He believed deeply in a moral element to literature, and saw that moral element as bound up with the story. In an essay on French Catholic novelist Francois Mauriac, Greene wrote,

> After the death of Henry James a disaster overtook the English novel . . . For with the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Ms. Virginia Woolf and Mr. E. M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper-thin. Even in one of the most materialistic of our great novelists – in Trollope – we are aware of another world against which the actions of the characters are thrown into relief. ("Francois" 551-552).

It is easy, in reading such a passage, to focus on the importance of "another world against which the actions of the characters are thrown into relief"[83]; however, the juxtaposition requires also "the human act": in other words, the story – the character plus his or her actions, existents plus events. These two worlds are God's world and the material world.

[83] which will be addressed later in the chapter.

God, for Greene, gives meaning to our existence. That meaning is as complex as a good story.

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We see these two worlds in *The End of the Affair* when Bendrix is shut out of one of them. Greene represents Bendrix's affair with Sarah not as a simple severing of ties but in terms of the exile from Eden and the fall from grace. *The End of the Affair* centers on Bendrix's affair with Sarah, how the affair ends, and the theology wrapped up in that ending; the symbol at that center is the fall:

> I never heard the explosion, and I woke after five seconds or five minutes in a changed world. I thought I was still on my feet and I was puzzled by the darkness: somebody seemed to be pressing a cold fist into my cheek and my mouth was salty with blood. . . . I realized first that I was lying on my back and that what balanced over me, shutting out the light, was the front door; some other debris had caught it and suspended it a few inches above my body, though the odd thing was that later I found myself bruised from the shoulders to the knees as if by its shadow. The fist that fitted into my cheek was the china handle of the door, and it had knocked out a couple of my teeth. After that, of course, I remembered Sarah and Henry and the dread of love ending.
>
> I got out from under the door and dusted myself down. . . . Through the blasted doorway I could see the grey morning light and I had a sense of great emptiness stretching out from the ruined hall: I realized that a tree which had

> blocked the light had simply ceased to exist – there was no sign of even a fallen trunk. (71-72)

The changed world is the world after Eden: a world of pain, labor, and suffering; a world of estrangement from ecstasy and union. The door has been shut in his face. Of course the door itself has hit him, but his bruise almost seems to be a mark of the door's shadow, as if he is more bruised by the metaphysical than the physical, more bruised by the shutting out of the light than by the door itself. Bendrix has been living in Eden rather than in the wider world of "great emptiness" that now prevails. The tree of life is no longer accessible to him. He has already eaten from the tree of knowledge, which is traditionally associated with sexual awakening. For Greene, the significance of that tree seems to extend to knowledge of love and sexual ecstasy, which Bendrix routinely describes in religious terms. Erotic knowledge gives Bendrix a taste of God. "[H]appiness annihilates us," he tells us:

> we lose our identity. The words of human love have been used by the saints to describe their vision of God, and so, I suppose, we might use the terms of prayer, meditation, contemplation to explain the intensity of the love we feel for a woman. We too surrender memory, intellect, intelligence, and we too experience the deprivation, the *noche oscura*, and sometimes as a reward a kind of peace. The act of love itself has been described as the little death, and lovers sometimes experience too the little peace. (47)

Everything blends together. Bendrix describes love as a kind of ecstatic unity – it brings him so far outside of himself that he loses himself. Indeed, this "infantilization" is the first step in psychologically remaking a person – breaking down their identity so it can be

rebuilt in another way, as a soldier, for example, or a fraternity member, or a member of a cult. Or as a Christian, in this instance. Bendrix's affair has been preparing him for this trauma which will finally annihilate him as he understands himself.

Interestingly, the tree obliterated by the V-1 "had blocked the light" – in other words, it was on obstacle between Bendrix and God.[84] In Greene's thinking, the tree of life – the one Adam and Eve are prevented from partaking of – is an obstacle to human understanding of and communion with God. The tree is a symbol of what properly belongs to God – of God's garden, God's world, an eternal world free of death. For humans to access that eternal, ecstatic connection with God, they must, in Greene's figuring, eat of the fruit of the other tree: they must feel, sin, know, and experience. To eat of that tree involves a range of feeling and experience, none of which can be shut out, all of which are coexistent. For Greene, the way to God is through the pain, suffering, and death that comes with human existence as much as love, joy, and life do – these are cornerstones, in his thinking, of Christianity. Pain and suffering are the biggest obstacles to belief for many, who cannot square the idea of God, a loving omnipotent being, with the reality of suffering. Greene's understanding of God answers this conundrum: the mystery of suffering is a crucial part of a Christian understanding of human existence. Furthermore, there is something to be gotten from it: in Passion, Eros, Agape and suffering coexist; it takes all of them for compassion – what exists between Bendrix and Henry – to come into existence. The Passion, Christ's sacrifice on the cross, is the greatest act of compassion and the basis for compassion: to have compassion, we ourselves must first have suffered. Pain and suffering exist because they are part of the

[84] The Light is a common metaphor for God; in 1John 1:5, God is equated with the Light.

experience that brings us to God, and their necessity and our pain are redeemed by our compassion for each other.

By repairing this estrangement through his relationships with Sarah, Henry, and the other characters with whom they bring him into contact, Bendrix is brought first to ecstatic connection in the paradisiacal relationship with Sarah and then to knowledge of his existential estrangement: he eats from the tree of knowledge, with its connections to maturity, morality, and sexuality, but he does not eat from the tree of life. The suffering is a key element in this process, as is the ecstasy that precedes it and that makes it possible. Ecstasy makes suffering possible, but suffering makes compassion possible – and compassion connects Bendrix with others, and possibly with Christ and God as well. But even this is only held out as a hope – the logical extension of what happens, but not a guarantee. The book ends not with Bendrix's "rebirth" or resurrection, but his misery. For Greene, misery itself, suffering itself, is important and holy, beyond its meaning as a part of the path towards compassion and salvation.

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Bendrix's existential condition as a writer is one of estrangement, not primarily from his essential being, although he undoubtedly is thus estranged, but estrangement from his fellow human beings. Twice during the course of the novel, Bendrix draws a distinction between authors and human beings. He says of Sarah, "I liked her at once because she said she had read my books and left the subject there – I found myself treated at once as a human being rather than as an author" (25), as if the categories "human

being" and "author" were mutually exclusive. He says something similar of Sylvia, the woman he meets at the interview with Waterbury and brings to Sarah's funeral:

> I could see that she was speculating – man? woman? what kind of a friend? and it pleased me. For I was a human being to her and not a writer: a man whose friends died and who attended their funerals, who felt pleasure and pain, who might even need comfort, not just a skilled craftsman whose work has greater sympathy perhaps than Mr Maugham's, though of course we cannot rank it as high as . . . (149)

Here, the distinction is clearer: a writer is more of a god – someone who doesn't experience feelings and is not affected by death. Bendrix uses his writing to feel superior. He uses it in fights with Sarah to appear above the situation and antagonize her. At one point after a quarrel, for instance, Bendrix says to Sarah,

> 'I've lain awake thinking of Chapter Five. Does Henry ever eat coffee beans to clear his breath before an important conference?' She shook her head and began to cry silently, and I of course pretended not to understand the reason – a simple question, it had been worrying me about my character, this was not an attack on Henry, the nicest people sometimes eat coffee beans . . . so I went on. (11)

This is another kind of superiority. Bendrix knows it's pretense, and he enacts the scene to manipulate Sarah's emotions. This interaction is both about his writing and an enactment of his writerly power – he's using the research aspect of writing as an excuse to probe more deeply into a person's life than he ought to, in an effort to humiliate Sarah. Bendrix's existential estrangement goes through a series of changes, from his initial estrangement from his fellow humans, though from ecstatic union with Sarah and God, to

his realization of his existential estrangement; in that process, his ideas about writing are brought to a crisis. The memoir he writes is, in part, a record of the loss, reforming, and reclaiming of his ability to write without the sense of superiority that previously bolstered that ability. More broadly, Bendrix understands himself as superior to other people – it is his self image, not others' images of him, that is at stake. With Sarah, he begins to feel human. And through his humanity, God can begin to work on him. Bendrix, by feeling superior, puts himself on the same level as God. To engage him on that level would be to dispute the question of Bendrix's belief in and relation to God on the wrong ground. Bendrix must first become human, eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and be cast out of God's realm. Only then can God deal with him. This understanding of the writer as superhuman is a key part of the dynamic of Bendrix's pride and subsequent fall, humiliation or humanization. It's also a cornerstone of Greene's peculiar Catholicism: for Greene, God operates in the world through us as human beings. All of our faults, all of our proclivities, all of our urges and loves are holy and redeemed because they are human – everything except pride, which is an attempt not to be human. The Whisky Priest and the lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory*, Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*, Pyle in *The Quiet American* . . . all struggle with and most fall prey to pride, perhaps the only sin in Greene's heterodox Catholicism.

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After Bendrix is hit by the door during the V-1 explosion, he is in an undefined liminal state, either dead or simply unconscious. The language Bendrix uses to describe this liminal period suggests that he has died:

> My mind for a few moments was clear of everything except a sense of tiredness as though I had been on a long journey. I had no memory at all of Sarah and I was completely free from anxiety, jealousy, insecurity, hate: my mind was a blank sheet on which somebody had just been on the point of writing a message of happiness. I felt sure that when my memory came back, the writing would continue and that I should be happy.
>
> But when the memory did return it was not in that way. (71-72)

The long journey, if we read this passage strictly, is simply a metaphor to describe how tired Bendrix is. But the vehicle of the metaphor exceeds the literal tenor of tiredness, and combined with Bendrix's being stripped of memory and emotion suggests the long journey to the afterlife. Bendrix does not speculate as to who might be about to write on him, but in the context of the novel, the implication is God. The continued happiness he expects tells us he is on the verge of entering heaven or some other paradise. The most interesting part of Bendrix's tantalizing taste of the afterlife is his sense of being on the verge of being written on: he is neither the subject nor the object of the writing, but the medium. This suggests that God's writing is not about him, but *is* him. It also suggests that it is an imposition, not something that arises out of Bendrix naturally.

A related moment happens when Bendrix has caught up with Sarah. Exhausted from pneumonia and trying to escape Bendrix, she has fallen asleep leaning against him in the church. He decides to try to write in her mind: "Children are supposed to be influenced by what you whisper to them in sleep, and I began to whisper to Sarah, not loud enough to wake her, hoping that the words would drop hypnotically into her unconscious mind" (130). He reassures her and tells her what "will" happen when she

leaves Henry – he tries to script the narrative of her future life. But it does not work; Sarah does the opposite of what he suggests. It should work as the unconscious works when Bendrix writes: the unconscious does the work while he's doing other things (19). But Bendrix cannot write in her mind the way that God would write on him, the way that the unconscious writes through him.

Over and over, earlier in the novel, such moments of peace and happiness happen in Sarah's presence. At one point, Sarah and Bendrix have planned to spend a rare entire night together, but partway through have an argument, and Sarah returns home in the blackout. Bendrix tries phoning her, but fails to reach her. "At last," he tells us, "I went to bed and took a double dose of sleeping-draught, so that the first I knew in the morning was Sarah's voice on the telephone, speaking to me as if nothing had happened. It was like perfect peace again until I put the receiver down" (59). The effect is to further link Sarah with God and romantic, sexual love with the holy.

Thinking about whether and how people exist in the afterlife, Sarah conceives of another way God writes in a fairly literal manner:

> I thought of certain lines life had put on his [Maurice's] face as personal as a line of his writing: I thought of a new scar on his shoulder that wouldn't have been there if once he hadn't tried to protect another man's body from a falling wall. He didn't tell me why he was in hospital those three days: Henry told me. That scar was part of his character as much as his jealousy. And so I thought, do I want that body to be vapour (mine yes, but his?), and I knew I wanted that scar to exist through all eternity. (110)

Sarah writes that she thinks not of God but of life writing on our bodies, but again, in the context of the passage in which she's trying to figure out whether she believes in bodily resurrection and God incarnate as Christ, the passage resonates with and reinforces the earlier passage of God writing on Bendrix's mind during his experience between life and death. Such writing creates him – it is his character. This a more realistic version of O'Brien's "aestho-autogamy." It also helps provide an interpretive context for the events in between.

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Greene's theology rests upon an understanding of man as living in the world apart from God. There are, however, two primary ways that God can exist in the world: through *Kairos* and *Logos*. Both are ways that God influences, writes, or scripts action. I shall deal first with *Kairos* and later with *Logos*, connecting them to *The End of the Affair* after first giving some context for their definitions. For God to "write," he must participate in the mundane world of chronological time – at least to the extent that his writing has a plot or a story, which both rely on chronological time. When He participates in the chronological world, he uses *kairos*.[85]

Kairos is difficult to define; its denotation is unstable and incomplete, and a proper understanding of the word relies on a synthesis of its various connotations. The Ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is the kind of time we are accustomed to: time that passes and can be measured by clocks and calendars; it is quantifiable. *Kairos* is more about *timing* than time as we are accustomed to thinking of it. Crowley and Hawhee write that *kairos* is

> a more situational kind of time, something close to what we call 'opportunity.'. . . an advantageous time. . . . In Roman rhetoric, the Latin word *opportunitas* was used in a similar manner; its root *port-* means an opening, and from it we get [the word] *portal*. . . . *Kairos* is thus a 'window' of time during which action is most advantageous. (37)

Kairos was personified as a god in the Greek pantheon. Crowley and Hawhee discuss his appearance in a bas-relief from Thebes, which depicts *Kairos* "flying . . . on. . . the back of Pronoia, the figure of foresight. Sitting dejected in the background is her counterpart, Metanoia, . . . the figure of afterthought or hindsight" (38-39). *Kairos*, then, is the present moment just as it happens, before it has lapsed into the past, as well as a peculiar insight, akin to foresight or hindsight, into the present moment. We might say that eternity is made up of all of *kairos*, in that it is always present and always infused with a knowledge of right relations.

Kairos has roots in particular ancient Greek practices of archery and weaving. Richard Broxton Onians says that *kairos*[86] "is supposed to mean 'due measure,' 'fitness,' 'opportunity,' etc." (343), but reveals in the course of his chapter on *kairos* that all of its many meanings, including "'parting, division'" and the "[*kairos*] of parts of the body through which weapons could penetrate to the life within" (345), have a less abstract meaning related to archery:

> the early Greek archer practised and tested his skill by aiming at an opening or a series of openings. Thus he must aim not only true but with power or his shaft,

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[85] He can also create existents via the *logos*.

[86] Onians uses the Greek spellings of the word: usually καιρός, but other variations as well, which refer to other grammatical and contextual uses. For simplicity's sake I have replaced the Greek with the English and refer readers to Onians's excellent work for a fuller explanation.

> though entering, would not penetrate through. [*kairos*] . . . describes that at which he aimed. . . . Such an opening is limited. . . . The shaft that misses the opening . . . either hits the iron around it or, in the case of the body, hits something against which it is ineffective, or it misses altogether. (Onians 345)

Readers of *The Odyssey* will recognize such openings from Odysseus's challenge, when he returns to Ithaca, to shoot an arrow through a dozen axe handles; he is the only one who can do it (*The Odyssey* book 21). *Kairos* becomes a kind of portal between worlds through which the divine can step or, as is the case in *The End of the Affair*, merely reach or shoot. *Kairos* also has roots in weaving as "the opening, the passage through the warp. . . the path of the shuttle with the woof, as the proper path for the arrow was through the series of apertures in the axes. The analogy is even closer. Arrow-shaped and arrow-named . . . spindles were used as spools[,] . . . and the casting of the spool or shuttle thus through the opening between the warp-threads is still known as a 'shot.' . . . [S]huttle itself derives form the same verb" (346). The two forms of the word *kairos*, then, are essentially the same: "The belief in the weaving of fate with the length of the warp-threads representing length of time" connects the two particular meanings by connecting this opening in the weft with supernatural notions of fate, just as the Greeks connected the portal of opportunity with a god to represent the concept. Greene uses this sense of *kairos* as God stepping through a portal to script events in the world to effect a particular fate; his use also resonates with the skilled deployment of craft and the antagonism of battle.

In a Christian sense, *kairos* refers more specifically to the world's being ready for the arrival of Christ – that the time has arrived when Christ's arrival is possible and can

be meaningful. More specifically, Paul Tillich, in *A History of Christian Thought*, tell us that *kairos* is

> the preparation for Christian theology in the world situation into which Jesus came. . . . It is not as if the revelation from Christ fell down like a stone from heaven, as some theologians seem to believe. "Here it is, you must take it or leave it." This is contrary to Paul. Actually there is a universal revelatory power going through all history and preparing for that which Christianity considers to be the ultimate revelation. (1-2).

Tillich expands this point to discuss the political, philosophical, religious, and theological developments that made possible a particular reception and understanding of Christ.

> Kairos is a moment in time which is related to the "Unconditioned." When Tillich speaks of the kairos, he speaks of the "Unconditioned." Kairos is the "point in history in which time is disturbed by eternity." (Michaud)[87]

Michaud quotes Tillich's *The Interpretation of History* here; that book was published in 1936, and it is likely that Greene, with his keen interest in theology, would have read it. Bendrix's wish in book five to "disturb their [Sarah and God's] eternity" (137) directly inverts Tillich's formula.

Kairos, then, accrues several connotations that are crucial to its understanding. It is always a rhetorical moment; in addition, it is the divine entering the mundane world and, by extension and by virtue of its Christian use, the birth of the divine and therefore creation. It is a teleological rightness; the weaving of fate, words, plot and narrative. It implies a particular relationship between fate and free will: the rhetor or writer must see the divinely provided and sanctioned opening and make use of it. Fate and free will,

then, operate in tandem; conversely, the writer who does not sense the *kairos* is working against fate. It is worth recalling the pagan origins of the word *kairos*, for in a pagan, polytheistic world-view, the gods are many and not omnipotent, and free will and fate can coexist more comfortably than they do in the monotheistic mind. *Kairos* is also aggressive – a shot that penetrates the body to kill – and thus evokes a sense of skill, craft, and even cunning. *Kairos*, then, becomes a richly nuanced word for a rhetorical moment – a moment of opportunity that the writer must seize in order to meet his or her persuasive objective and weave it into history. It is a moment blessed by the divine but open only to those writers skillful, cunning, and aggressive enough to spot it and make proper use of it.

Bendrix is not that writer. He tries to be; he thinks he is – but he misunderstands the nature of the moment and overplays his hand. He tries to write the course of his love with Sarah but does not fully understand that, as love, its time is properly eternal rather than chronological. "[I]f love had to die," he tells us, "I wanted it to die quickly. It was as though our love were a small creature caught in a trap and bleeding to death: I had to shut my eyes and wring its neck" (35). The chief difference between love and a love affair is not simply that a love affair ends, but that love is eternal and a love affair is chronological, a difference which goes beyond the expiration date right to the very nature of each and the time each occupies. Bendrix wants to control the affair rather than its controlling him, but he is incapable of identifying eternal time, let alone working with it. He can conceive only of chronological time. Early in the novel, he tells us

> When I began to realize how often we quarreled, how often I picked on her with nervous irritation, I became aware that our love was doomed: love had turned into

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[87] Michaud cites Tavard 1962, 88-89. Tavard in turn cites Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, 174.

> a love-affair with a beginning and an end. I could name the very moment when it had begun, and one day I knew I should be able to name the final hour. When she left the house I couldn't settle to work: I would reconstruct what we had said to each other: I would fan myself into anger or remorse. And all the time I knew I was forcing the pace. I was pushing, pushing the only thing I loved out of my life. As long as I could make-believe that love lasted, I was happy – I think I was even good to live with, and so love did last. (35)

Bendrix does not really believe in eternity or eternal love – he can only pretend it is true. Eternal love is an idea to him, and he understands that. Love not only does not end; it also does not begin. It is eternal, a little bit of heaven on earth, not only in the joy it brings, but also in the kind of time it belongs to. Although Bendrix experiences this kind of time when he's with Sarah, during the time of the affair (as opposed to when he is writing about it), he believes that his sense of love's eternity is not real but a product of his imagination. He can conceive of it only as love's "lasting," but eternity doesn't endure – duration belongs to the historical world of chronological time. Eternity simply *is*, full stop. And so Bendrix, rather than letting love simply be, tries to script its course and hasten its end. There are two major implications of this love's being eternal: While the affair itself can end, the love cannot; and by virtue of its eternal nature, it is larger than Bendrix and Sarah: it is of God, and anchors them in God's world. The affair itself is a rather long kairotic moment that Sarah and Bendrix must take advantage of – a long intrusion of God's world into historical time. Arguably, the entire affair is a deft rhetorical move by the implied God of the text to bring Sarah, Bendrix, and even Henry to Him.

Bendrix repeatedly writes of Sarah as participating in this time. In her living-room, "nothing matched, nothing was period or planned, . . . everything seemed to belong to that very week because nothing was ever allowed to remain as a token of past taste or past sentiment. Everything was used there, just as in Henry's study I now felt that very little had ever been used" (13). Sarah has a knack for living in a quasi-eternal time. Her moral structure borrows from eternity, too, but in a peculiarly Greenian fashion, in which sin drops away. She "had a wonderful way of eliminating remorse. In her mind when a thing was done, it was done: remorse died with the act. She would have though it unreasonable of Henry, if he had caught us, to be angry for more than a moment. Catholics are always said to be freed in the confessional from the mortmain of the past" (50). Mortmain is a wonderful word here: literally "dead hand," it is a real estate term that means perpetual possession (usually by the church) of a piece of land. To describe guilt as the mortmain of the past gives it a terrifying weight – and the eternity of God's grace (love and forgiveness) takes on an equal lightness.

When Sarah dies and Lance seems to be cured by the poem she wrote in her book as a child, Bendrix and Father Crompton talk around the subject of how Sarah might have cured him:

> 'Oh, it was written years ago. She wrote that kind of thing in a lot of her books like all children.'
>
> 'Time's a strange thing,' Father Crompton said.
>
> 'Of course the child wouldn't understand it was all done in the past.'
>
> 'St. Augustine asked where time came from. He said it came out of the future which didn't exist yet, into the present that had no duration, and went into the past

> which had ceased to exist. I don't know that we can understand time any better than a child. " (179).

Sarah, in life and in death, is a saint not merely because she is kind, or because she seems to heal people through touch, but because she intuitively participates in God's world. If she is a saint, as sainthood is constructed in this novel, it's because she can easily participate in this kind of time – and then in chronological time too. Like a saint, she "stands outside the plot, unconditioned by it" (186). She has free will because she is not bound to chronological time.

Opposed to the long kairotic moment of the affair is the action of book four, chapter one – Bendrix's hunt of Sarah through the wet streets of London, after he has read her journal and feels he finally understands the situation.[88] Greene does not use the term *kairos*, but he uses the concept. Repeatedly in *The End of the Affair*, Greene and Bendrix imply that close timing almost brings Sarah and Bendrix back together, but something or someone intervenes as if by magic: It seems that God reaches into the human world and nudges it here or there so that events unfold according to a predetermined plot. The entire episode is replete with kairotic moments, split-second timing, and Bendrix's smug "knowledge" that he will prevail.

Paradoxically, Bendrix's smug knowledge plays right into God's hands – Bendrix's every move brings him closer to God; when it doesn't, God intervenes by kairotically adjusting the plot. When Sarah tells Bendrix "'I won't be here. I'll get up,'" Bendrix thinks, "'If I run, it will only take me four minutes across the Common; she can't dress in that time.' I'll tell the maid not to let anybody in'" (126). He is plotting the

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[88] See Friedman 146 on the hunt and time, and the entire essay on Greene's use of time more generally, but especially; see also Walker's article, "World without End."

episode down to the minute; however, his plot continually fails to materialize: he has taken account of how long it takes her to dress, but has not been able to take the weather into account:

> It was a worse night than the one when I met Henry a month before. This time it was sleet instead of rain: it was half-way to snow and the edged drops seemed to slash their way in through the buttonholes of one's raincoat: they obscured the lamps on the Common, so that it was impossible to run, and I can't run fast anyway because of my leg. I wished I had brought my war-time torch with me, for it must have taken eight minutes for me to reach the house on north side. I was just stepping off the pavement to cross when the door opened and Sarah came out. (127)

The mention of the night Bendrix met Henry a month before ties these two events together, so that we have in mind not only the weather of that night, but also other aspects of it as well, such as the fact that "if [Bendrix] had believed then in a God, [he] could also have believed in a hand, plucking at [his] elbow, a suggestion, 'Speak to him: he hasn't seen you yet" (7). A similar suspicion is at work here, too: We wonder if a hand has reached down , like an edged-rain-drop though a buttonhole, and tweaked the weather. As the episode progresses, we wonder: Why does Bendrix repeatedly miss Sarah?

The entire episode is like this, telling us down to the minute and the split second exactly what elements are in play and how they affect the timing of the action. At one point we are told "She was in too much of a hurry to see me across the wide roadway through the sleet" (127) that Bendrix can follow her depends on the width of the roadway, the weather, her hurrying. Moments later, she must exit the tube station

because "she had no bag with her and when she felt in her pockets no loose money either – not even the three half pence that would have enabled her to travel up and down till midnight" (127). These details are reported and important because they lend a fated quality to the events. *The End of the Affair* deals in coincidences versus God's fated will, and this episode is the centerpiece. The coincidences come fast and furious. It begins to seem improbable that he keeps missing, and on subsequent reading of the novel, with the knowledge of all the so-called coincidences that Bendrix can no longer give the name, we begin to suspect the same force is at work, that God is orchestrating the events, interrupting the story with split second timing again and again to tweak it to His own ends: in other words, He takes advantage of several tight kairotic moments. Here, the moments seem to appear often as a result of the flow of events already set in motion: When Bendrix crosses the Commons, he knows the *kairos*, the window of opportunity, will last only about four minutes; God arranges the weather so that it takes him eight. But we can imagine God effecting a *kairos*, creating all the existents and events that will conspire to bring a particular moment to pass. We can also imagine God closing a *kairos*. Along these lines, we might ask if God somehow made sure, in the past, that there would be no money in Sarah's coat, or that she grabbed the wrong coat. As God, residing in eternity, he always has access to all of time. It is nothing for him to reach "back," as we imagine it, to change a detail. The narrative gives the sense of a tightly orchestrated event, and one cannot shake the idea that someone – whether God or Greene[89] – has

[89] Whether one decides it's God or Greene tweaking the plot says a lot about how one reads the book, the episode, and perhaps how one reads in general. Are we committed postmodernists, who see the author behind the story, or the reader constructing it? Are we so committed that we see no author at all, only the cultural conditions that encourage us to read the passage one way and/or another? Or are we – as I think Greene hopes, and writes his prose to achieve – so drawn into the novel that the only reasonable answer is God?

orchestrated it so that it works out the way it does. For God to "write," he must participate in the mundane world of chronological time – at least to the extent that it has a plot or narrative, which both rely on chronological time. As William Blake wrote in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," "Eternity is in love with the productions of time."

Several times Bendrix tells us how certain he is that he will succeed. "I thought with happiness, I have her now. I knew with absolute certainty that before the night was out we should have slept together And once that had been renewed, anything might happen" (127); "I was triumphant" (127) he believes, before he has triumphed. Perhaps most telling of all, he tells us "I wasn't very worried – if I didn't find her today, I would the next. Now I knew the whole absurd story of the vow, now I was certain of her love, I was assured of her. If two people loved, they slept together; it was a mathematical formula, tested and proved by human experience" (128). Bendrix knows the story, but has taken away a wrong interpretation. His pride colors the entire episode. This certainty, interlaced with all the last minute, split-second obstacles, makes us believe Bendrix's logic: it *should* have happened Bendrix's way. That it did not, over and over, points to some other power at work. Mathematics and human logic do not work here. The implication is that God has repeatedly twisted one or two elements so that the episode works out according to his plan. The implication is that God has effected, closed, or made use of a *kairos*, over and over, to shift the weather, to ensure there is no change in Sarah's pocket – perhaps having worked this out earlier, perhaps having been able to foresee this – even afflicting Bendrix with a lame leg, well ahead of time, so that these events play out this way. And these coincidences are only a few of several.

The effect of all these kairotic rewritings of the episode is to bring the pair to church rather than to bed or to an explosive argument in front of Henry. The two are allowed shelter, so they may speak to each other without the possibility of Sarah's breaking her vow and without the possibility of anything too explosive happening. In the end, Bendrix is appeased, confident enough to pursue her no longer but merely wait for the phone while God plays his hand. Bendrix is simultaneously enticed but placated, and Sarah is exhausted, cold, and wet – her condition, in other words, is worsened enough so that she dies eight days later. Bendrix is poised so that Sarah's death has the maximum possible effect on him. Bendrix cannot, after Sarah's death, utter the word *coincidence* any longer, though he still cannot yet say "that foolish newspaper word that was the alternative to 'coincidence'" (188-9). This peculiar insistence on fate as indicating God's action, as well as the split second timing, makes these moments kairotic. These are moments of opportunity that God creates and seizes, openings into the life of the novel's characters that he creates and shoots the arrow carrying the thread of fate through, weaving their fate as he writes the plot.

Narratologically, *kairos* is a way for God to direct the plot. All plot leads to God, and if they do not, God adjusts them so they do. In this way, free will only exists insofar as it does not disturb the teleology of the plot, with the possible exception that saints may be able to add to that teleology, and thus have a truer kind of free will. "The saints . . . in a sense create themselves," Bendrix writes:

> They come alive. They are capable of the surprising act or word. They stand outside the plot, unconditioned by it. But we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy of non-existence. We are inextricably bound to the plot, and

> wearily God forces us, here and there, according to his intention, characters without poetry, without free will, whose only importance is that somewhere, at some time, we help to furnish the scene in which a living character moves and speaks, providing perhaps the saints with the opportunities for *their* free will. (186)

This is a devastating view of human existence – existential at its core, and rooted in the notion of two worlds, one conditioned and one unconditioned, one historical and one eternal, one dependent upon the other which is the ground of its being.[90] Greene must have believed in these two worlds, but I doubt that it was his personal view of human existence that some of us are mere pawns: he had too much respect for the mystery of our basic human desires, urges, and instincts, and seems to have seen something holy not only moving through them, but also at their roots. This particular view of the two worlds and how people relate to them allows Greene to not only express an understanding of Bendrix's dark mood and mind, but also a set of rules for the operation of his novel. It is, in other words, a controlling aesthetic vision, and it splits the novel into two levels, one supernatural, thereby restoring the lost dimension to the English novel. It also expresses something about how those levels work: God interferes by pushing characters around into the right situations at the right time for his particular ends to manifest. I am not convinced that this is so that the saints may shine, as Bendrix seems to think (186). That is Bendrix's view of character, and does not seem to correspond to the movement of the novel's plot: Sarah, however, saintly, does not quite shine. Rather, the plot of *The End of*

[90] I am dependent on the theological writings of Paul Tillich for this understanding. "Ground of being" and "unconditioned" are his terms, if not taken from some even earlier theologians. Tillich was writing at the same time as Greene, and it's likely Greene took these terms and concepts from Tillich, as he read theology and Tillich was a prominent theologian. They appear throughout Tillich's work.

the Affair seems designed to move Bendrix along to a place where he must confront God and his own humanity. It is not Sarah's movements as a saint that matter, but how they force Bendrix towards an acknowledgment of God's existence.

Sarah, as a saint of the text, works the *kairos*, sending her mother to Bendrix at the funeral (159). But God works this to his advantage, too: Mrs. Bertram's presence is not simply Sarah saving Bendrix, but God supplying Bendrix with the knowledge that Sarah was baptized a Catholic. The debate over a Catholic burial versus a secular cremation is not about the disposal of Sarah's remains. Bendrix does not care one way or the other; he argues the issue because he resents God's continuing to work on him, to haunt him, to pester him into belief: to hunt him as he hunted Sarah. God "hunts him down the labyrinthine ways," hunts him not so that he can solve a mystery, as Bendrix hunts Sarah, but so that he can reveal one.[91]

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The other way that God participates in the world of the novel is through *logos* – if anything, a trickier term than *kairos*. *Logos* is best understood as the underlying structure of the world, or the inner logic by which things work. Literally, *logos* means "word," and is the root of the word *logic* and every *–ology*. Like *kairos*, it comes to us from ancient Greece by way of Christianity. But while *kairos* finds it modern home largely in the field of rhetoric, *logos*, while it has meaning in rhetoric as one of the three Aristotelian proofs,

[91] *The Power and the Glory* was originally published in America as *The Labyrinthine Ways*, after a phrase in Francis Thompson's poem "The Hound of Heaven," which opens thus: "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; / I fled Him, down the arches of the years; / I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways / Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears / I hid from Him." The phrase applies at least as well to Bendrix as it does to the whiskey priest.

finds its modern home largely in philosophy and Christianity theology. Divinity Professor Christopher Stead tells us that

> Logos emerges as a philosophical term with Heraclitus (c.540–c.480 BC), for whom it provided the link between rational discourse and the world's rational structure. It was freely used by Plato and Aristotle and especially by the Stoics, who interpreted the rational world order as immanent deity. Platonist philosophers gave pre-eminence to *nous*, the intuitive intellect expressed in logos.

Logos is immanent deity as the underlying rational structure of the world, accessible by the rational human mind and/or intuition, and expressible through language. The Stoics conceived of *logos* as pervasive, infused in all things, and linked with the air and breath. R. B. Onians also describes *logos* as meaning, for the Greeks, both thought, whether spoken or unspoken (13), and "speech, thought conceived materially as breath, spirit . . . [. W]e become intelligent by drawing in the divine [*logos*] through in-breathing" (76 n. 9). In other words, *logos* is at work in inspiration: we breathe in deity when we are inspired. The Stoics, furthermore, "held that the universe embodied a *logos* as its supreme directive principle. Natural objects, plants and animals have their own increasingly complex patterns of behaviour, culminating in the human reason, itself a lower analogue of the universal logos" (Stead). The Stoics called these lower analogues of *logos*

> *logos spermatikōs*, seminal or spermatic *logos*. This was an idea that the Stoics had worked out to explain how every being contains within itself a principle of development suitable to itself—an idea that they applied to the individual beings within the cosmos as well as to the cosmos itself in its entirety. . . . We are told,

> for example, that God, "in looking to the birth of the world, holds within himself all the seminal *logoi*, according to which each thing is produced" (*Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* 2.1027). (Pèpin 5503)

Logos spermatikos, then, is like a God-given DNA, with *logos* itself as a sort of uber-DNA; the various *logoi spermatikoi* are hierarchically arranged, with rational thought and language approaching *logos* itself, near the top of the hierarchy.

Jean Pèpin tells us that

> The point to appreciate is that, for the Stoics, *logos* is associated with all the functions that are normally attributed to the divine. Logos is destiny and providence. Chrysippus, one of the founders of Stoicism, tells us for example that 'it is in conformity with the Logos that what has happened, has happened, that what is happening, is happening, that what will happen, will happen' (*Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* 2.913). The Logos impregnates the world, from within, with its order and rhythm. (5501)

Logos, then, controls the development not only of existents but of events as well; it is not only DNA, but script. *Logos* is linked with creation as the blueprint for all things that exist and events that occur. *Logos*, then, is God's agency – another path by which God can function in the human world, or in fictional representations of it.

For the Stoics, *logos* was animistic. In a monotheistic context, it takes on a different meaning, different conceptual problems, and an ironic similarity to the spell-casting – it becomes the "magic word" that makes everything happen. Pèpin tells us that

> Philo of Alexandria, as well as the early Christians, confers upon the Logos a number of different functions . . . . [including] *creation*. . . . The idea of speech

> as creative is hardly likely to have arisen in Greece, where men thought instead in terms of an antithesis between . . . talking and doing. Quite other is the world of the Old Testament, where sentences abound such as those in Psalm 33:9: 'For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.' Philo was especially struck by . . . this temporal coincidence between the divine command and its effect: 'At the moment that he speaks, God creates.' (5504)

This is a far cry from the Stoical *logos*, which infuses the world at least in a lesser form. In a Christian context, *logos* resides in God and is sent out into the world; it does not exist in the world until God sends it in the person of Christ. *Logos* never finds an easy or natural fit in a Christian context, largely, Paul Tillich maintains, because the "concept is not the description of an individual being, but of a universal principle. If one is not used to thinking in terms of universals as powers of being, such a concept as logos remains impossible to understand" (HCT 30). Tillich says the *logos* is

> the principle of the self-manifestation of God. The Logos is God manifest to himself in himself. Therefore, whenever God appears, either to himself or to others outside himself, it is the Logos which appears. This Logos is in Jesus as the Christ, in a unique way. . . . The incarnation is a once-for-all event; and it is not a particular element or characteristic of God which becomes incarnate. Rather, it is the very center of divinity which becomes incarnate, and to express this, the idea of the Logos was used. The problem was to combine monotheism, which was emphasized so strongly against pagan polytheism, with the idea of Christ's divinity. Both aspects of Christ, his humanity and his universality, had to be kept together . . . . In the Apologists the incarnation is not the union of the

> divine Spirit with the man Jesus; rather, the Logos really becomes man. (HCT 31-32)

Here, we start to lose the idea of a pervasive rational structure to the world. There is a rich stew of ideas around the concept of the divine *logos*.

Greene was certainly a Catholic, but his theology was heterodox at best. Although he would never consider himself pagan – he wrote to his lover Catherine Walston, on more than one occasion, that he wished they *were* pagan so that they would be free to divorce their spouses and each other (Letter 8/18/1947 and 8/24/1947) – Greene's use of *logos* is much closer to that of the Stoics, the exception being that hovering behind Greene's *logos* is a decidedly personified Christian God. For Greene, the *logos* and Christ are loosely linked at best: the importance of Christ for Greene in *The End of the Affair* is that he existed in the flesh, and thus he sanctified and gave meaning to the experiences, urges, desires, and suffering of the flesh. When Christ is discussed in *The End of the Affair*, it is in the context of his body: he is a Catholic Christ, not a Protestant one, of a piece with "a very materialistic faith. A lot of magic . . ." as Henry puts it (111). For Greene, Christ's divinity is a given; it's his humanity that needs emphasis and exploration. Greene's *logos* utilizes a variety of characteristics typically attributed to the *logos* from different sources. When he uses *logos*, he often emphasizes different characteristics, so his *logos* does not always look the same. The same principle of God in the human world is, however, present each time.[92]

Early in the novel, Bendrix is much more at ease with the ineffable aspects of writing, because it can be more vague and need not have anything to do with God at that

point. He explains how he writes in psychological and philosophical terms, using images of depth that suggest soul, but avoiding images of God.[93] The absence in this context speaks volumes.

> So much in writing depends on the superficiality of one's days. One may be preoccupied with shopping and income tax returns and chance conversations, but the stream of the unconscious continues to flow undisturbed, solving problems, planning ahead: one sits down sterile and dispirited at the desk, and suddenly the words come as though from the air: the situations that seemed blocked in a hopeless impasse move forward: the work has been done while one slept or shopped or talked with friends. (19-20)

The word "superficiality" sets up a dichotomy: if the days are superficial, the nights, when the work of writing magically happens, are deep, below the surface. But the Bergsonian "stream of conscious" brings us to entirely different metaphorical territory, and the spatial question of surface or depth disappears momentarily in favor of questions of time and flow. We move, also, from psychological or religious territory into philosophical territory. "Sterile" provides another metaphor again, recalling the fertilizing aspect inherent in *logos spermatikos*, and bridges the gap between the stream of consciousness and the adjective "dispirited." The term "dispirited" turns the initial metaphor on its head: rather than happening in the depths, writing magically happens in the spiritual heights, and "the words come as though from the air." Immediately, we return to the stream of consciousness: what was "blocked" now flows. The geography of

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[92] If Greene understood the term *kairos*, he certainly understood the term *logos* from both his theological reading and from having read John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*, which he had on a reading list for Catherine Walston along with Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (Greene "Reading List").
[93] Thomas More draws the distinction between spirit as height and soul as depth in *Care of the Soul*.

Greene's theology is all over the map; possibly the lack of clarity reflects Bendrix's own confused spiritual state. Bendrix has no idea where this magical writing happens, or even whether a spatial metaphor is more appropriate than a temporal one. In this formulation, it is the unconscious or the stream of consciousness: Freud and Bergson will do to explain the mystery of writing. But even early in the novel, God invades the language: "the words come as though from the air." At the root of such a formulation is the idea of divine inspiration; whether one invokes the pagan Muses or the Christian God, the divine I in the very air Bendrix breathes.

This mixing of metaphors may be intentional on Greene's part, as a way of showing how lost Bendrix is. It provides a neat range of terms for Bendrix to use while purposely skirting the notion of divinity in inspiration. All of these fragments of ideas about how writing happens can be summarized by the term *logos* – something animistically in the world under the surface, something breathed in, something that directs action, something fertilizing – even simply words, ideas and structures themselves. Bendrix had certainly not meant to allow God into this discussion of his writing – we have seen elsewhere how passionately he battles God for control of his own writing – but Greene nonetheless implies that God is behind this inspiration.

Bendrix draws our attention to the connection between his novels and his life as things that are written:

> And all that time I couldn't work. So much of a novelist's writing , as I have said, takes place in the unconscious: in those depths the last word is written before the first word appears on paper. We remember the details of our story, we do not invent them. War didn't trouble those deep sea-caves, but now there was

> something of infinitely greater importance to me than war, than my novel – the end of love. That was being worked out now, like a story: the pointed word that set her crying, that seemed to have come so spontaneously to the lips, had been sharpened in those underwater caverns. My novel lagged, but my love hurried like inspiration to the end. (35)

Bendrix implies that he's working out the end of love, but he does not actually claim this agency for himself. He says that "there was something of infinitely greater importance to me," but he then uses the passive voice to describe the crafting of the end of the affair, quite possibly because, while on the one hand he wants to blame himself, he also wants to blame God, without feeling as though God has control over his life. God is responsible, he believes, for Sarah's death, but here he implies that God is also responsible for the affair's end. He has said that he and Sarah hurried their affair to the end, that the bomb was only the last straw, but here he divests himself and Sarah of direct responsibility. God does not simply ghost-write for Bendrix via the *logos*: he writes the actions of Bendrix's life, too, and he does it in a way that weakens Bendrix as a writer. When God writes Bendrix's life, Bendrix stops writing. He cannot breathe life into his stories; he writes "the work of a craftsman," without passion – work that doesn't live, work that never tapped into the *logos*, work with no *logos spermatikos* of its own.

Bendrix understands what God is doing as writing. God is speaking the magic words, scripting events through His *logos*, and tapping into the *logos spermatikos*: when Bendrix decides not to kill himself, it is God working through Bendrix's innate character, through the ways he experiences emotion, his own particular modus operandi, the particular logic of how he functions in the world:

> it is my profession to imagine, to think in images: fifty times through the day, and immediately I woke during the night, a curtain would rise and the play would begin: always the same play, Sarah making love, Sarah with X, doing the same things that we had done together, Sarah kissing in her own particular way, arching herself in the act of sex and uttering that cry like pain, Sarah in abandonment. (74)

This is the *logos* again: the source from which a writer creates. Because he is a writer, this is his how he operates: in images. But this power is completely out of Bendrix's control. At least part of what we get out of this passage is the intensity of Bendrix's attachment and passion, as well as his intimate familiarity with Sarah, an intimacy that he feels is being violated. In moments like this, the *logos* isn't particularly remarkable: It makes sense that a jealous man like Bendrix, prone to creating scenarios in his mind, would be reliving his relationship with Sarah and feeling anxious about her taking another lover. But at the crucial moment when Bendrix is poised to kill himself, God steps in kairotically and redirects the action by tapping into the *logos*. Bendrix tells us that

> it was a memory that stopped me – the memory of the look of disappointment on Sarah's face when I came into the room after the V1 had fallen. Hadn't she, at heart, hoped for my death, so that her new affair with X would hurt her conscience less, for she had a kind of elementary conscience? If I killed myself now, she wouldn't have to worry about me at all, and surely after our four years together there would be moments of worry even with X. I wasn't going to give

> her that satisfaction. If I had known a way I would have increased her worries to breaking point and my impotence angered me. How I hated her. (74-75)

God finds not only the right memory to prevent Bendrix's suicide, but also one that would work with his particular inner logic – for he does use a kind of logic in these last lines to arrive at the conclusion that he does not want to commit suicide after all. *Logos*, remember, is accessible through and connected to human logic. But the memory also works on Bendrix's insecurity, jealousy, and hatred: all parts of his internal make-up or internal logic, and so therefore themselves a kind of *logos* or *logos spermatikos*. The God of *The End of the Affair* can cause images and memories to bubble up as if from a common or an inner personal repository, as well as manipulate us by playing on our basic make-up – our emotional palette of response and actions, our particular way of working through things, our outlook on the world – all the ways we operate: our modus operandi, our *logos spermatikos*. In this, He is very much like a writer: He creates plot through character.[94]

Having read O'Brien, Greene knew how logic might be used in a novel, and Greene, a master craftsman, was capable of using any tool at hand. Unlike O'Brien, he doesn't use logic to a comical end, and readers respond violently to this "despotism." Sarah's logical conundrum is that if Bendrix is alive after her prayer, it means not only that God exists, but also that she can no longer see Bendrix and must now believe in God and act in ways that belief makes necessary to her. Bendrix's logical conundrum is that he hates God, but if he hates something, it must exist. But the biggest logical trick of

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[94] John Gardner, Anne Lamott and Richard Russo, among many other authors, tell writers they need to begin with character or risk having wooden characters and artificial plots. It's a truism among fiction writers.

them all is the teleological trick: the suggestion that God writes, or at least gives meaning to, the events of the book. The logic works like this:

> Did I ever love Maurice as much before I loved You? Or was it really You I loved all the time? Did I touch You when I touched him? Could I have touched You if I hadn't touched him first, touched him as I never touched Henry, anybody? And he loved me and touched me as he never did any other woman. But was it me he loved, or You? For he hated in me the things You hate. He was on Your side all the time without knowing it. You willed our separation, but he willed it too. He worked for it with his anger and his jealousy, and he worked for it with his love. For he gave me so much love and I gave him so much love that soon there wasn't any thing left when we'd finished, but You. For either of us might have taken a lifetime spending a little love at a time, eking it out here and there, on this man and that. But even the first time, in the hotel near Paddington, we spent all we had. You were there, teaching us to squander like you taught the rich man, so that one day we might have nothing left except this love of You. (123)

In a particularly clever way, the logical trick works right in the word "You," which, with the change from upper case to lower case, becomes a kind of special name, too – a secret name that Sarah used when speaking on the phone with Bendrix so as not to raise suspicion. Sarah conflates Bendrix with God and the love of Bendrix with the love of God: Loving Bendrix is practice towards loving God and squandering, both fully experiencing it and getting rid of it to make room for God, brings Sarah closer to that point in time when she will find God. An extramarital affair becomes the road to piety.

Indeed, God's ways in *The End of the Affair* are mysterious, quite literally: pursuing an answer to the mystery of who Sarah's new lover is leads Bendrix through a similar process as Sarah is led through via the affair: a confrontation with God and an introduction to His Mysteries.

One of the best ways we can conceive of *logos* is as that of God that can become material or flesh. Indeed, this seems to be the primary function of *logos*. While theologians may speak of *logos* residing in and with God[95], that is mainly to establish its divinity. *Logos* really finds its meaning in being that part of God that can be sent out, in material form, for the Stoics, or more narrowly in human form, for Christians. The incarnation – that God becomes flesh – defines what it means to Greene to be Christian. For Greene, God works through flesh, often mysteriously: we cannot know the end game, although Greene hints that it is the reconciliation of souls to God, and specifically in this instance the reconciliation of Bendrix's soul to God. There are a surprising number of startling plot twists, despite the story's being presented *in media res* and via flashbacks. New information and new perspectives often change what we thought we knew. For Greene, this theology implies that God is in the flesh, and that we are part of a larger story, although the meaning and plot evade us. To know the meaning and plot for Greene's characters implies pride, although Sarah seems to be absolved of this sin. For Greene, we are saved by flesh: not only are we saved by the mysterious passion, suffering, and love of Christ on the cross, but also, and more radically, that same

[95] For some Christians, most notably Theophilus of Antioch, "At first God is alone, and the Logos is quite simply God's weighing up of things within himself; then, when he wishes to create, God brings forth the Logos to be his instrument and his messenger" (Pèpin 5503). Pèpin notes that "In the second century and at the beginning of the third, almost all Christian theologians write of the Logos in a way that implies development: starting from a lack of distinction within the innermost being of God, they make the Logos 'proceed' from out of God and take upon himself the work of creation" (5503). Eventually, as Christian doctrine evolved, the historical element was erased from the *logos* to preserve God's eternal unity.

principle is at work in our own lives, through our own bodies. God is "Henry with his astigmatism, Richard with his spots" (120).

Greene makes it clear that erotic passion brings us closer to God by teaching us love. Suffering, of course, is always the most difficult part of religion to come to terms with, and Greene honors that: Bendrix's suffering and the turmoil it gives rise to not only prompt and drive the novel, but remain unresolved at the novel's end. It is easier to accept that erotic passion brings us closer to God by introducing us to love and ecstasy; it is harder to accept that suffering brings us closer to God. We want God to be benevolent, and it is counter to this instinct to understand suffering as God. Greene suggests that suffering allows us to feel compassion for others, who suffer also, and that this is a deeper kind of love that brings us even closer to God. This begs the question, of course: why must others suffer? Why must anyone suffer at all?

Greene's theology of flesh provides the answer. To exist in the flesh is to experience a whole range of physical and emotional feelings, up to and including death. In an early draft of the novel, Greene included an epigraph by St. Augustine: "There is no sanity in those whom anything in creation displeases" ("Point" Autograph MSS). This, of course, also begs the question: why do we exist in the flesh at all? Greene seems to suggest that it is how we learn: Without the flesh, we could not grow. Sarah and Bendrix squander. They learn to experience love and ecstasy. They learn what God is. They suffer the loss of each other, and that loss makes room for God through Bendrix and Sarah's affair: the flesh leads to emotion, which includes and thus leads to love. The flesh is the vehicle of the *logos*, in two ways: The first, of course, is as Christ's body. The second, Greene might say is even more important: our bodies. At this point in the

argument, the question-begging can really go no further: we either accept the answer as *a priori* or we reject it out of hand. But we can note that flesh exists only in the material, chronological world outside Eden, the world in which people live. Greene is arguing against Joyce's removal of human life to an edenic paradise in which love not only reigns but flattens out all other meaning. Suffering, for Greene, is a part of what God means: God means a division of the world into two worlds: God's eternal world, outside of time and place, and the human world, stuck in time and place and therefore subject to suffering. To collapse the two – to try to make love the center of all, the most important thing – is not only to destroy suffering, but also to flatten life out, to destroy the moral dimension of life and literature, the dimension which gives it meaning.

It is in the context of flesh that Sarah considers God's writing on Bendrix's body. But this interestingly brings Greene closer to Joyce, wanting to include not only what is nice, pleasant, and good in their statements about what life means and how literature operates. Greene suggests that it's not just Christ on the cross, suffering chastely, that gives meaning to life and literature, but also Sarah, her insecurities, her affairs, her suffering, her love of touch, Bendrix and his love of Sarah, his jealousy, his suffering – all of these, not simply love – chaste or otherwise. Life and literature have meaning not in the perfection of the pearl but in the fire of the opal. But Greene takes it a step further. For Greene, the meaning comes from the other, additional , spiritual dimension that gives teleological meaning to our strengths and faults.

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I spoke earlier about layering, how Greene interweaves ideas about writing into the plot and themes of the novel. This creates not only particular effects, but also the broader effect of a layered structure to the novel. If we pay attention, we see these additional structures, but is we do not notice them, they still act on us. Greene uses these layers to create the effect of God's moving in the narrative. He uses *kairos* and irony to create layers that add a dimension to the usual narrative structure. *Kairos* demonstrates how Greene understands God to work in the world – but *kairos* in *The End of the Affair* is not God working in the world, but Greene working in fiction. *Kairos* depends on there being two worlds for it to connect.

Greene relentlessly returns to the idea of two worlds, and explicitly links it to irony. At one point, Bendrix tells Parkis about a mistake he has made: "'If you look at it from the outside, it's really quite funny,'" which is true as far as it goes – dramatic irony is enjoyable. But Parkis's response holds the key to the whole dynamic: "'But I'm on the inside, sir'" (40), he tells him, and with that, you feel both Parkis's pain and Bendrix's deflation and shame: Bendrix feels badly for laughing at Parkis. Feeling badly brings him back to Parkis's level, to the human world of pain. A simple instance of irony – irony itself – is simultaneously used and problematized. Greene is not just saying that pride is the only real sin; he's also really enjoying and feeling real guilt over committing it. Even in irony, he's bringing us back to the lower world, to suffering. We are not allowed to enjoy a sense of ironic superiority here; but we are allowed to experience its structure.

God also exists in the time structure of the novel. Bendrix may simply be paranoid when he writes, "Do I in fact of my own will choose that wet black January

night on the Common, in 1946, the sight of Henry Miles slanting across the wide river of rain, or did these images choose me?" (7), but he's not wrong to suspect that God is behind the overall shape of his memoir or the meaning that shape imparts to the memoir. God's intrusions into his writing life and Bendrix's rivalry with God *as a writer*, as a determiner of event and theme, profoundly unnerves Bendrix.[96] Elsewhere, Bendrix writes ,"when I write that word [lovers] my brain against my will travels irresistibly back to the point at which pain began." (42). Whatever force it is that opposes Bendrix's will – call it God or love or obsession – it unmans him as a writer in a very specific way: it changes the discourse of his memoir by changing the sequence in which he recounts events. It forges connections between one part of the novel and others, connections requiring only a word or a theme to be activated. Over and over, this force compels Bendrix to return to the beginning and the end of the affair, thus enacting circular structure. When combined with the connections that resonate throughout the novel, what emerges is not simply a circular structure but an eternal one: the whole is contained in every moment, every part.

This structure is opposed to the structure Bendrix seems to want to use: the hunt. Lucy Pake has noted that there are many resonances with the courtly love tradition in *The End of the Affair*. One which she does not name is the narrative structure of the hunt. Indeed, if the story were to use the hunt as a structure, it would be right to start with Bendrix and Henry meeting in the rain in January 1946. That is when Bendrix learns about his rival, about Henry's suspicions, and learns about the Savage detective agency.

[96] Despite Greene's trying to leave the question of whether God exists and intervenes in this novel open-ended, to read the book this way is to read it against the grain (Paguaga). While acknowledging that Greene does technically leave the question open-ended, I have elected to read the novel with the grain and to speak of God as an existent in the novel.

The name "Savage" is no mistake, of course, nor is the fact that Parkis looks remarkably like Shakespeare, whose *Rape of Lucrece* gives us a version of the hunt. Indeed, Parkis's physical features are the most thoroughly described in the novel. Three separate times, we are told of his eyes and moustache: "long moustache and fawn-like eyes" (31), "those gentle apologetic eyes, that long outdated moustache" (36), "those hang-dog eyes, that penurious mustache" (86). Bendrix describes Parkis's watching Sarah in terms of the hunt: "I thought I could detect in Parkis's next report a genuine enthusiasm for the devil's game. At last he had really scented love and now he stalked it, his boy at his heels like a retriever" (61). The entirety of the fourth book is modeled on the hunt, too, and rife with vocabulary appropriate to the hunt: Bendrix speaks of his "attempt to trap Sarah (but for what purpose? To hurt Henry or to hurt myself?)" (52), and tells us that "she had evaded pursuit" (52). Earlier in the novel – in one of those instances where Greene weaves the entire novel into a whole through the repetition of a key trope, Bendrix writes, "It was as though our love were a small creature caught in a trap and bleeding to death: I had to shut my eyes and wring its neck" (35).

The chapter that describes the end of the affair is circular, as are Sarah's journal and the novel as a whole. The circle is a traditional symbol of eternity – it has no beginning, no end, and no sides or corners; it is simply a single whole. The chapter starts and ends with Sarah saying "'You needn't be so scared' . . . 'love doesn't end . . .'"(73), but the ending is presented as a recap. One has to turn the pages back to read the scene in full; the chapter literally enacts a circular structure. When one does return to the beginning, one finds Sarah and Bendrix arguing about whether all love is like the love for

God, with the implication that the love for God is exactly like the love for a lover, only more so.

> I felt that afternoon such complete trust when she said to me suddenly, without being questioned, 'I've never loved anybody or anything as I do you.' It was as if sitting there in the chair with a half-eaten sandwich in her hand, she was abandoning herself as completely as she had done, five minutes back, on the hardwood floor. We most of us hesitate to make so complete a statement – we remember and we foresee and we doubt. She had no doubts. The moment only mattered. Eternity is said not to be an extension of time but an absence of time, and sometimes it seemed to me that her abandonment touched that strange mathematical point of endlessness, a point with no width, occupying no space. . . . She wasn't lying even when she said, 'Nobody else. Ever again.' There are contradictions in time, that's all, that don't exist on the mathematical point. She has so much more capacity for love than I had – I couldn't bring down that curtain round the moment. I couldn't forget and I couldn't *not* fear. Even in the moment of love, I was like a police officer gathering evidence of a crime that hadn't yet been committed. (50-51)

Here, the mysteries of eternity – one of the mysteries of God – are directly contrasted with more mundane mysteries: lack of trust forces one out of the eternal, out of divine love, and into time, into the mundane love that constitutes the kind of affair one might hire a detective to find out – the kind of mystery that involves crime and criminals. In contrast, any crime, when viewed from Sarah's or God's point of view in eternal time, is forgiven and contained in the moment.

The entire affair is grounded not only in paradise, but in eternity. Sarah is often spoken of in religious terms, and one subset of those revolves around the idea of eternity. God works through Sarah to introduce Bendrix to eternity. His book eventually shows the marks of his experience in and his yearning for eternal peace: even the ending shows Bendrix telling God to leave him alone, ironically so that he can have some peace. That the book begins and ends with Henry suggests that compassion is meant to take the place of passion. The implication is a divine bait-and-switch: God has gotten Bendrix hooked on feelings of joy and security, has softened his heart, and has entwined his life with Henry's. He is now to experience the kind of compassion that converted Sarah to Catholicism. The implication is also that Greene thinks compassion is the higher form of passion. Greene explains suffering this way. It allows us to love our fellow humans in a way that isn't sexual, although sexual love clearly has its place. It's a revised version of courtly or platonic love, in which love of the beloved leads one, through complicated steps, to God – and in Greene's version, that means also to God's time.

Bendrix's book takes on an eternal structure, too; he suggests that it "fails to take a straight course" (50), and worries about where he starts. Rather than proceeding from beginning to end, he enacts a circle with Sarah and God, love and pain, in the middle. At both ends are Bendrix and Henry, brought together in a peculiar kind of compassion. That shape tells us what, in the end, the book is about. It is not about hunting down Sarah's lover; it is not about romance or winning or losing, not even about death. It is about uniting the poor amongst us in compassion.

Through Sarah, Bendrix is introduced to not only eternity, but paradise. Sarah writes that Bendrix "is jealous of the past and the present and the future. His love is like

a medieval chastity belt: only when he is there, with me, in me, does he feel safe. If only I could make him feel secure, then we could love peacefully, happily, not savagely, inordinately, and the desert would recede out of sight. For a lifetime, perhaps" (91). This is his nature: he is jealous and insecure. The wording, however, suggests something beyond that. Bendrix is not simply jealous of other men; he is jealous of time. But in his moments with Sarah, and quite explicitly when they have sex, all of the insecurity and jealousy recedes; in the timeless moment of absolute pleasure and pure love, Bendrix finds peace. This is Bendrix in Eden or heaven; both are places of absolute love, peace, innocence, and security; both are also timeless. No one ages, no one dies, no one labors or suffers.

Bendrix finds the same peace when he contemplates death, but specifically a death that would perpetually prolong the affair:

> Death never mattered at those times – in the early days I even used to pray for it: the shattering annihilation that would prevent for ever the getting up, the putting on of clothes, the watching her torch trail across to the opposite side of the Common like the tail-light of a slow car driving away. I have wondered sometimes whether eternity might not after all exist as the endless prolongation of the moment of death, and that was the moment I would have chosen, that I would still choose if she were alive, the moment of absolute trust and absolute pleasure, the moment when it was impossible to quarrel because it was impossible to think. (70).

Bendrix can only imagine eternity as something that happens after life. As a non-religious man, there is no hope for him to conceive of eternity in this lifetime; that would

require a belief in something beyond this world, beyond this moment and this lifetime. But most people are unsure about what happens after death, and few are able to accept the idea that their existence comes to a complete end. Bendrix does not want the moments of the affair to end. He does not want paradise to end. This is how he conceptualizes heaven: a paradise of love that never ends; a world in which his lover never leaves; a world in which he does not think, but only loves; a world in which he does not doubt himself, but accepts being loved in return.

The Judeo-Christian God cannot exist in a chronological world, a world in which one is born, grows old, and dies. But God can act in this world in discrete moments through the *kairos*, and humans can experience, channel, and mimic God's grace, peace, and eternity. They do this through people like Sarah, who seem uniquely connected to God, and through other means of tapping into the *logos*. Sarah is a kind of medium between God and the people she knows.

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Bendrix's epigraphic utterances also cover what it takes to make writing quick, or live. When Bendrix and Sarah go to see a film of one of his novels, he complains that

> The film was not a good film and at moments it was acutely painful to see situations that had been so real to me twisted into the stock clichés of the screen. . . . At first I had said to her, 'That's not what I wrote, you know,' but I couldn't keep on saying that. . . . Suddenly and unexpectedly, for a few minutes only, the film came to life. I forgot that this was my story, and that for once this was my dialogue, and was genuinely moved by a small scene in a cheap restaurant. The

> lover had ordered steak and onions, the girl hesitated for a moment to take the onions because her husband didn't like the smell, the lover was hurt and angry because he realized what was behind her hesitation . . . . The scene was a success. I had wanted to convey the sense of passion through some common simple episode without any rhetoric in words or action, and it worked. For a few second I was happy – this was writing. (43)

Bendrix tells us that what makes the scene work is the complexity that we can understand instantly, so that it seems simple and does not need to be explained in depth. It's a kind of shorthand, a way that writing can represent real life without calling attention to its own written-ness. But we can see, as well, that the subject matter adds to how this scene comes to life: real writing must have real human situations at its heart: the kind of situations that involves details like onions. The fact that Sarah, too, notes that this part of the movie lives, and uses it to signal her willingness to Bendrix (43-44) helps to shore up our understanding that it's not only technique, but also subject matter that makes writing live.

But it takes more than technique and subject matter to make writing live: there is "something over" (107), something ineffable about it. Bendrix notes that

> Always I find when I begin to write there is one character who obstinately will not come alive. There is nothing psychologically false about him, but he sticks, he has to be pushed around, words have to be found for him, all the technical skill I have acquired through the laborious years has to be employed in making him appear alive to my readers. . . . He never does the unexpected thing, he never surprises me, he never takes charge. Every other character helps, he only hinders.

> And yet one cannot do without him. I can imagine a God feeling in just that way about some of us. The saints, one would suppose, in a sense create themselves. They come alive. They are capable of the surprising act or word. They stand outside the plot, unconditioned by it. But we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy of nonexistence. We are inextricably bound to the plot, and wearily God forces us, here and there, according to his intention, characters without poetry, without free will (185-186).

Bendrix tells us it's a kind of fictional free will that makes certain characters "live"; he *implies*, however, that it's something more than that, something like every-day inspiration, or the more literal version of inspiration, the breath of God in these characters. Whether it is the breath of the author or the breath of God, *logos* is probably the best word for it: the word of God, the word made flesh and brought to life.

Even the breath of God (or the author) is not enough to make writing live, for Bendrix. It takes love as well. Early in the novel, Henry surprises him with his psychological astuteness, and Bendrix manages to twist the moment to pettiness. Henry says

> 'When you are miserable, you envy other people's happiness.' It wasn't what I had ever expected him to learn in the Ministry of Home Security. And there – in the phrase – the bitterness leaks again out of my pen. What a dull lifeless quality this bitterness is. If I could I would write with love, but if I could write with love, I would be another man: I would never have lost love. Yet suddenly from across the shiny tiled surface of the bar-table I felt something, nothing so extreme as

> love, perhaps nothing more than a companionship in misfortune. I said to Henry, "Are *you* miserable?" (12).

Bendrix frequently claims that the opposite of love is hate, but throughout *The End of the Affair*, hate is shown to be an aspect of love, or at least to be, with love, jealousy and suffering, part of the larger dialectic of passion. Hate, like jealousy, shows involvement and betrays either a love or at least a deep concern underlying it. Bendrix and Sarah both struggle with hating God, not because it's the wrong thing, but because to hate God means to believe in Him. Love, for Bendrix, is not really opposed to hate, which seems to light a passionate fire in his writing, but to bitterness. It is "dull and lifeless." For Bendrix, and possibly for Greene as well, passion is the quality that quickens writing and makes it live.

Greene's aesthetics and theology share some surprising commonalities with Joyce's in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Both are heterodox; both want a more catholic sense of religion. Both want to include as somehow holy all those things that make us live – those things that quicken. Pain and shame, for both authors, are not debasing, but part of what it means to be human. But Greene seems to think he's arguing against Joyce. His use of the "literary" name Maurice, his personal feelings about Joyce, and his deliberate use of Bloomsday all signal that he wants to say something about Joyce. The Bloomsday evidence seems to indicate that Greene thinks Joyce's idea that loves lies at the heart of life and literature is lacking – that not only love, but pain and suffering, that intensity and compassion, prayer and God are at the core of things: it is not the beginning of the affair, but it's end that is important. Only at the end can the whole become what it is in an eternal sense: only then does it stop developing, like a portrait

through time, and settle into something definable. By engaging ideas of chronological and eternal time, Greene is engaging Joyce's idea of a portrait in words, bringing him back to his earlier work and disowning his later work. We cannot tell much by what happens in a single day, Greene says. We need multiple perspectives – we need Bendrix's account and Sarah's journal, we need information from Sarah, from Sarah's mother, from Smythe, from Father Crompton . . . . And we need a teleological sense of what things mean: we need another dimension which is not simply different, but superior. Things need to come to some manner of completion and conclusion. And we need more than a date, more than the first day that lovers meet: we need to see it through to the end to see the shape, meaning and import of the whole. We need, also, those things that God uses in the novel: the plot, *kairos*, the characters, the situation, the *logos* – all the things that make a story are God's material. We need God in the world, and relatedness. Greene's use of Bendrix as an epigraphic character rewrites Joyce's aesthetics and theology by adding suffering and God, plot, character, texture and super-ordination[97] into the mix. Otherwise Greene's aesthetics and theology are surprisingly like Joyce's aesthetics and theology. There is overlap with the theology and aesthetics implicit in the epigraphic aspects of *A Portrait*, but Greene takes them much further.

He does that, in part, by incorporating O'Brien's approach. Far from merely a joke, and far even from simple metafiction or magic realism, O'Brien's methods showed Greene structural tricks he could use to create that extra-Jamesian supernatural dimension – tricks he could use scrupulously to become a "despotic" writer (O'Brien, *At Swim* 33),

[97] See Chace, "Spies and God's Spies," esp. 159-161, on super-ordination in Greene; the same principle is at work here.

tricking his readers through his fictional structure into religious belief. [98] O'Brien's peculiar mixing of structural jokes about sex, religion, aggression and logic are used no less radically in *The End of the Affair*, but are much more subtle, which is part of their radicalism.

The End of the Affair also demonstrates to what extent conventional fiction is inherently metafictional. This extra dimension, this God dimension, was a normal, implied part of the novel before the advent of literary modernism. Greene is reclaiming metafiction for conventional writers. Greene's goal is to restore the spiritual dimension to the novel quite literally by adding dimensions to the standard narrative structure, dimensions that reach out toward the reader through his deft use of irony, for example. Greene draws the reader into a closer relationship with him and the text.[99] But there are other ways Greene uses the structure of the text to draw the reader in, not least of which is the use of pathos: such a moving love story – the book is practically a bodice-ripper (Spier) – draws the readers in, propels them through the text, and gets them involved in the story. It's a smoke-and-mirrors trick: if we are looking there, we don't notice that the entire time, he's also talking about writing, setting up logical traps, and using the

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[98] Mrs. Campbell, a reader, sent Greene a letter about *The End of the Affair* detailing how the book has relentlessly haunted her since she read it. She is unable to convince herself that it's "just a story" and the characters were only characters as she usually can. She continually tries to find ways out of the logical bind – alternate endings that would allow Sarah and Bendrix to be together. She seems to sense there's a reason why these alternate endings didn't occur, and is stuck, as many people are, wondering how a God could exist who allows suffering. She also senses that there is something real about the story, and thinks it might be the characters; I argue later in this chapter that this sense of the book's reality is caused by the particular epigraphic structure Greene sets up, which meshes a third "God level" of the novel with the usual "real level" or rhetorical level of the book – the level of the writer and reader.

Greene replied sympathetically to her letter and kept a copy of both the original and his reply. It's entirely possible that Greene wasn't unscrupulous, but merely more cunning that he realized. The fact remains that if the reader does not spot the givens in the logic behind Greene's narrative structure or does not adequately separate fiction from reality – a difficult task with a story that one gets "sucked into" – that he has tricked the reader into participating in a world of belief and possibly bringing that belief back to the world.

[99] See Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*.

structure not only to restore the “cosmic dimension” but also to structure that dimension and its rules in particular ways, so that it sits on top of normal novelistic structure and looks like it, and is connected to it through *kairos* and *logos*. But sitting on top is not quite the right spatial metaphor: the cosmic structure sits under it, the ground of its being, or around it, encompassing it and sometimes breaking through it. It exists in it as the germ of potential. And though the structure looks similar, the cosmic structure is eternal: time works differently there; objects and peoples are always present. *The End of the Affair* only seems to be a conventional novel. Really it is the most radical novel of the three treated in this dissertation.

Greene, like God in his novel, tries to trick us into belief. He employs his craft in a way that, for many, moves under our radar – I have mentioned this book as a main text for my thesis to an astonishing number of advanced lay readers and professional literary critics who have failed to remember that Bendrix is a writer. We hardly blink when a character is a writer: it seems normal, somehow, that writers would write about themselves and what they know. But the presence of a writer, even or especially in what feels like a conventional narrative should arouse our suspicion. It is a sign that the author is opening up whole new dimensions in the text, a scaffolding for a purpose beyond that of the conventional novel and likely particular to it.

We tend to want to forget that it’s Greene, not God, organizing the coincidences, largely because we are good readers of realist novels. Faith, Greene demonstrates, is as easy as the willing suspension of disbelief, exactly the same suspension we habitually engage in every time we pick up a book or watch a movie. Some readers have so much

trouble with this that they become angry with Greene or feel tricked. "*The End of the Affair* has always provoked its readers," Michael Gorra writes:

> [Sarah's] sense of anguished wonder is so powerful that even a seriously lapsed Catholic may run out in search of a Mass at which to kneel. Other readers . . . have come to the miracles of the novel's conclusion, in which the dead Sarah seems to intercede in human affairs, and felt so full of a different anger – anger at Greene, not God – that they have looked for a wall to throw the book at. Sometimes those readers are even the same reader, someone exasperated to the precise degree of his – of my – earlier emotional engagement. (vii)

But it is not simply Sarah's belief that persuades: it is the narrative set-up of the entire novel. It is harder, in fact, to give up our belief in the realist novel's world, to stop suspending our disbelief, than it is to negotiate our belief in a supreme being. In this way, Greene's novel is the despotic novel that O'Brien joked about: the outward accidents of illusion outwit us, not in a shabby fashion, but in a brilliant, inspired, calculated and cleverly crafted one.

For all that, it is not entirely clear to what extent and on what grounds Greene disagrees with Joyce, misreads him, or simply stakes out a claim in the same territory and fights largely to differentiate himself. It seems clear that Greene objects to the thoroughness of Joyce's leaving the church, insisting rather that such heterodoxies as Joyce's and his own are actually at the paradoxical heart of the Catholic faith, if not the church itself. His disagreement with Joyce is largely a boundary quibble: what Joyce calls out of the church Greene calls in the church. It is a disagreement over nuances. Quite possibly, Greene thought he was adding God, the sexual and the material to the

epigraphic dynamic; the question depends, of course, on how he understood James Joyce, the Lynch/Dedalus exchange, the character of Stephen Dedalus and his relation to Joyce, and whether he connected it to the composition of the villanelle or Joyce's use of sexuality throughout his novels. But whatever Greene's starting point, his positing of Maurice Bendrix as a literary brother to Stephen Dedalus is apropos: they write about the same aspects of the epigraphic dynamic, but with different emphases and styles; they come from the same family, but are not themselves the same.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: The Epigraphic Dynamic and the Epigraphic Novel

> *And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathies away in recoil from things gone dead.*
>
> -D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

To understand how Joyce, O'Brien and Greene used the epigraphic character, it has been necessary to look closely at the epigraphic utterances in their novels and the various contexts of those utterances, and so what started as a narratological thesis about the existence and functions of the epigraphic character has become a critical study. Criticism and theory must interact and support each other, however. From these three examples, we can see a strand of the history of the epigraphic character, and we can extrapolate the component parts of the epigraphic dynamic, the types of epigraphic novels, common themes related to the epigraphic character, and the relation of the epigraphic character to frames and metafiction. Further study is necessary to confirm, expand, and refine these claims, but I hope they will serve as a first sketch of how the epigraphic character works.

The epigraphic character is only one part of the epigraphic dynamic, which also includes the *epigraphic statement*, *epigraphic utterance*, *graphic enactment*, *epigraphic enactment*, *epigraphic structure*, and *controlling aesthetic vision*. This dissertation has

focused on the *epigraphic utterance*: what an epigraphic character says about writing, literature, or in some cases art. *Graphic enactment* – a fictional portrait of a writer writing, such as Stephen Dedalus writing his villanelle – is an important part of the epigraphic dynamic, because it gives us additional insight into the *epigraphic statement* – what the author actually says through the epigraphic dynamic. The epigraphic utterances and any scenes of graphic enactment comment on each other; such commentary makes space for an unuttered epigraphic statement: what Joyce, for instance, implies about aesthetics without having to actually say it outright. The epigraphic dynamic allows authors to be cagey about such statements. It also allows them to be somewhat sneaky: while Bendrix says one thing, for instance, Greene does something different. Bendrix talks about the difficulty of making characters live; Greene creates a new dimension in the novel – *an epigraphic structure*, a structure or plan for how he wants fiction to work. A *controlling aesthetic vision* is an epigraphic structure that forms the guidelines of an *epigraphic enactment*. The narrator's plan for his novel in *At Swim-Two-Birds* would be a controlling aesthetic vision; the narrator's novel would be an epigraphic enactment. Each of these elements contributes to the epigraphic dynamic; the interplay of these elements adds complexity to the reader's experience of the novel and increases interpretive difficulty and interpretive room for the writer to disguise his or her intentions. The epigraphic character does not espouse the author's ideas about writing and literature so much as he enacts or effects them in the novel. What the epigraphic character actually says – the epigraphic utterance – is not necessarily what the author thinks, but it initiates the epigraphic dynamic that itself communicates the epigraphic statement: what the author actually says about literature. The epigraphic dynamic also

includes the otherwise "normal" rhetorical dynamic between the author and the reader that is mediated through the text. The epigraphic dynamic works within normal fictional and rhetorical structures as a small addition to them. It does not disrupt these structures; it depends on them. For this reason, epigraphic novels are not metafictions.

Occasionally, the epigraphic dynamic might include an additional party who holds ideas about literature which are under scrutiny: Joyce's younger self, for instance, is an additional party in the epigraphic dynamic in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Likewise, Joyce himself, or Joyce as Greene understood him, is an additional party in the epigraphic dynamic of *The End of the Affair*, because Greene implicitly critiques what he takes to be Joyce's ideas about literature. Flann O'Brien's use of the epigraphic character was a model for Greene as he wrote *The End of the Affair*, but O'Brien's ideas about literature are not at issue in *The End of the Affair*; he is part of its epigraphic dynamic in a different way. Brecht and Joyce are both part of the epigraphic dynamic in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, although only Joyce is used as a model. O'Brien twists Brecht's ideas into a model for his narrator to use, but he himself uses Joyce's model. Thus models and additional parties sometimes overlap, but are not the same: one provides a structure or pattern to use, the other provides material. David Lodge has brought the use of the *epigraphic target*, an additional party that is the target of a satirical epigraphic statement, to a peak with his academic trilogy (*Changing Places*, *Small World*, and *Nice Work*). In his own academic publications, Lodge excels at bringing literary theory into common-sense accord with fiction as we normally understand it,[100] but in his fiction, rather than mitigating the quirks and excesses that make literary theory so notoriously

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[100] See *The Art of Fiction*, a series of articles for the *Independent on Sunday* and the *Washington Post* that helped to bring literary ideas to a general public.

trying, he pokes fun at them. A few short examples should suffice: Morris Zapp, in *Small World*, tells Fulvia Morgana that literary deconstruction is "kind of exciting – the last intellectual thrill left. Like sawing through the branch you're sitting on" (118). When introducing Robyn Penrose's character in *Nice Work*, the narrator says of her relationship with her boyfriend Charles: "There was sex of course, but although both of them were extremely interested in sex, and enjoyed nothing better than discussing it, neither of them, if the truth be told, was quite so interested in actually having it, or at any rate in having it very frequently" (33) – sex, to them, is a theoretical discussion first and foremost. And Persse in *Small World*, acting as the knight in a grail quest for the best literary theory, asks a panel of expert literary theorists, "What follows if everybody agrees with you?" (319). In other words, how is literary theory applicable? What are its real-world repercussions? The particular target of these epigraphic moments varies, but literary theorists in general are, more than simply targets of Lodge's satire, part of the epigraphic dynamic he creates in his academic trilogy.

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Randall Stevenson argues that in the modernist novel, what I've called the epigraphic character expresses "opinions about art [that] not only reflect the views of the author, but relate directly to the novel in which they are expressed. . . . [T]exts talk about their own methods, or artists discuss or demonstrate problems and priorities that also figure in the construction of the novel in which they appear" (164-165). This study has found that, in addition to Stevenson's explanatory type, two other types of epigraphic characters exist: comic and non-comic. *Comic* epigraphic novels, such as *At Swim-Two-*

Birds, are usually satirical, and their epigraphic dynamic often takes a particular set of literary theories, or literary theory itself, as its target. David Lodge's academic trilogy falls under this category, as does Kate Atkinson's *Emotionally Weird.* The heroine of *Emotionally Weird* is a lazy university student who writes fiction – a subtype of the epigraphic character descended from Joyce via O'Brien. She is more interested in her writing than in her literature tutorial:

> 'Blah, blah, blah,' Archie said. (Or something like that.) Ten minutes after eleven in Archie McCue's room on the third floor. . . .
>
> '*When Words no longer strive for mimesis they become dislocated and disconnected. They illustrate in themselves the exhaustion of forms. Writers who eschew mimesis, looking for new ways of approaching the fiction construct, are disruptivist – challenging what Robbe-Grillet refers to as the "intelligibility of the world"*.' Archie paused. 'What do you think of that statement? Anyone?' No-one answered. No-one ever had any idea what Archie was talking about. (27)

While the heroine/narrator has an immediately dismissive response to this bit of literary theory, the epigraphic dynamic of the novel itself is much richer: the students in the novel's writing course all write novels, in various forms – science fiction, detective fiction, etc. – and *Emotionally Weird* includes pieces of them all in various fonts, creating a manic energy out of them similar to the energy of *At Swim-Two-Birds*. The utterance becomes a controlling aesthetic vision for the novel, which finds energy in the "exhaustion of forms" and manages to connect the disconnected pieces, even if, in the end, there doesn't seem to be a satisfactory locatable meaning. There isn't one in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, either, but that doesn't disrupt its enjoyability.

There is plenty of meaning in the *non-comic* epigraphic novel, whose epigraphic utterances may be in place specifically to create that novel's meaning. Greene and Joyce arrived at strikingly similar meanings for life and literature through their epigraphic statements – meanings that revolve around the central themes of God, sex, creativity, passion, and suffering. Joyce's epigraphic statement argued for a more catholic empathy, a broader acceptance of the range of human emotion and experience, in both life and literature. Greene argued for compassion – similar to Joyce's empathy – because it gives meaning to our suffering; he also argued for God's role in the world as a creator who is continually writing the world with a particular teleology, located in eternity, in mind. Both formulate an empathetic ethos – they use literature to persuade us to accept a broader range of human feeling (Joyce) and to do so as part of being compassionate (Greene). They persuade us on two fronts: their epigraphic statements, and their stories, which center on characters that test our acceptance and compassion. Philip Roth, in the American trilogy (*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*), combines these two fronts, creating an empathetic ethos of literary activity. He does this by using the epigraphic character Nathan Zuckerman to tell a framed story. Readers often take this framed story for the only story. In a review of *American Pastoral* in the *Atlantic Monthly* for instance, Ralph Lombreglia writes that

> the idea that a stringy-haired, sputtering sixteen-year-old destroys her father's life with a terrorist bomb reads like a piece of apparatus wheeled in from another novel altogether – even from another world. It never ceases to feel arbitrary, trumped up, forced upon the poor Swede. This is mostly because the notion seems to have little reality for the author, leaving him to summarize and

> philosophize rather than dramatize the concrete. . . . The abstracted treatment of ideas, the weighty, morally serious exposition, result in a novel that holds its material at arm's length from the reader. A story has to work as a story before it can work as an allegory.

But the Swede's story isn't Roth's, exactly: it's Zuckerman's. Zuckerman's own tale is thin enough that Lombreglia finds it not worth mentioning or forgets it's there, which is easy to do, because while *American Pastoral* begins with Zuckerman's story, it does not return to it at the end. The Swede's story is half-framed, as it were. Zuckerman idolizes Swede Levov. He begins the novel by stating that

> to wish oneself into another's glory, as a boy or as a man, is an impossibility, untenable on psychological grounds if you are not a writer, and on aesthetic grounds if you are. To embrace your hero in his destruction, however – to let your hero's life occur within you when everything is trying to diminish him, to imagine yourself in his bad luck, to implicate yourself not in his mindless ascendancy, when he is the fixed point of your adoration, but in the bewilderment of his tragic fall – well, that's worth thinking about. (88)

It is "worth thinking about," perhaps, but no less "untenable on psychological grounds" because Zuckerman is a writer or because his hero has fallen. Although Zuckerman is no longer a child, he still idolizes Swede Levov. He still cannot see him dispassionately. The story fails because Zuckerman cannot imagine a nuanced picture of the Swede, who can only be a hero to him – a fallen hero now, but a hero nonetheless. Lombreglia notices the story's failing, but he fails to notice that it's Zuckerman's story failing, not Roth's. Roth's story is about Zuckerman's inability to tell a story about a man he

passionately idolizes. That the novel does not return to Zuckerman's own time underscores the depth of that passion and that inability.

Roth implies that idolization is itself the problem. Throughout the trilogy, Zuckerman moves further from his heroes, until in the last book of the trilogy, *The Human Stain*, he is writing about Coleman Silk, whom he likes well enough but does not idolize. Zuckerman is able to get close enough to be fascinated and half in love – he even dances with Silk at one point – but remains removed enough to notice the inconsistencies, the foibles, the remarks like Silk's "lily-white" that don't harmonize and force him to paint a more nuanced and realistic picture. This ability to be involved without being thrown off-center works whether you're a writer creating a biographical portrait of a character, a reader trying to understand a character, or a person trying to understand other people. Zuckerman says in *The Human Stain*,

> You fight your superficiality, your shallowness, so as to try to come at people without unreal expectations, without an overload of bias or hope or arrogance, as untanklike as you can be, sans cannon and machine guns and steel plating half a foot thick; you come at them unmenacingly on you own ten toes instead of tearing up the turf with your caterpillar treads, take them on with an open mind, as equals, man to man, as we used to say, and yet you never fail to get them wrong. You might as well have the *brain* of a tank. You get them wrong before you meet them, while you're anticipating meeting them; you get them wrong while you're with them; and then you go home to tell somebody else all about the meeting and you get them all wrong again. Since the same generally goes for them with you, the whole thing is really a dazzling illusion empty of all perception, an

> astonishing farce of misrepresentation. And yet what are we to do about this terribly significant business of *other people*, which gets bled of the significance we think it has and takes on instead a significance that is ludicrous, so ill-equipped are we all to envision one another's interior workings and invisible aims? Is everyone to go off and lock the door and sit secluded like the lonely writers do, in a soundproof cell, summoning people out of words and then proposing that these word people are closer to the real thing than the real people that we mangle with our ignorance every day? The fact remains that getting people right is not what living is about anyway. It's getting them wrong and wrong and wrong and then, on careful consideration, getting them wrong again. That's how we know we're alive: we're wrong. Maybe the best thing would be to forget being right or wrong about people and just go along for the ride. But if you can do that – well, lucky you. (35)

Zuckerman, of course, is the writer who's secluded himself; by the end of the novel, he's decided to end his seclusion because he "wasn't paying attention to his [Coleman Silk's] predicament as merely a mental exercise. His difficulties mattered to me" (43). Zuckerman walks us through involvement and distance, connecting them to imagining, reading, and telling – to writer, character, and person. Through the frame tale, he models working with involvement and distance as well, drawing on an analogy between what Zuckerman does as a writer as he reads people, probes their character, and creates fictional characters; what readers do as they interpret fiction; and what people do as they live among other people. As with Joyce and Greene, an aesthetics of empathy emerges, one which allows for the odd detail that makes us individuals – one in which we are

capacious enough to include our hero's tragic flaw. By giving us framed tales that Zuckerman barely mediates, Roth gives us the chance to practice that empathy. When we return to the frame tale, Zuckerman's epigraphic utterances help us to reflect on how that empathizing works. If the comic epigraphic novel is satiric and targets literary theory, the noncomic epigraphic novel complements it with an ethos of empathy that both shows and tells us how stories work through the exercise of empathy.

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Several other themes in addition to literature, writing, and literary theory, are related to the epigraphic character. Life, sex, passion, and God are the most prevalent. *The End of the Affair* seems to be about death, but that death highlights the condition of Bendrix's life as estrangement from both Sarah and from God. The novel begins and ends with Bendrix's grieving Sarah's death, and ends with him going for a drink with Henry: we are estranged; we find some solace in companionship and compassion – this is life, or existence at any rate. Any more lively version involves love, either of God or sexual love – something that prompts an ecstasy in which we can experience eternity. Life is also a kind of text that God writes or edits in *The End of the Affair*. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, life shows up as a concern with money, food, walking, cigarettes – engagement with the material world, all the things opposed to Stephen's philosophizing. Money, food, cigarettes and walking all make their way into *At Swim-Two-Birds* in a similar way: the narrator wants to "make book," and needs money for a book; he smokes; he retreats to his room. In Lodge, lived experience – as it appears in fiction – is the foil to literary theory: "sex" is a term we assume we understand, until the

end of the sentence reveals it to be a critical topic. *Nice Work* continually pits the world of Robyn Penrose's literary theory against the world of Vic Wilcox's lived experience. In Roth, life comes up in the same dynamic of withdrawal and engagement that we see in Joyce and O'Brien: Zuckerman leaves New York to seclude himself in the Berkshires, and writes books that serve the purpose of modulating his attachment to people. In Joyce, literary theory is also opposed to sexuality; in O'Brien, sexuality is aligned with literary theory and writing as masturbatory acts.

It makes sense that the epigraphic character's theories are so closely tied to sexuality. Creativity, after all, is often figured in sexual terms: producing an artistic work is a kind of reproduction, creating a kind of procreating. One conceives of an idea and nurtures the nascent idea until it is born. We even disseminate seminal works in seminars. The codes, the languages we use to talk about sex and creativity, are the same. Furthermore, such language reflects an intuition we have about creativity: as Arthur I. Miller shows in *Einstein, Picasso*, creativity is often deeply linked to a strong sexuality that transgresses social norms. What is more surprising is the link between the epigraphic character and other aspects of passion: Greene's pain and despair, for instance, or the raw authenticity of Joyce's more violent, dirty passions – even O'Brien's narrator needs a bath. It is possible that such transgression itself helps to release creative energy, but these authors have also intuited something about the raw nature of the world. At base, nature is red in tooth and claw. The world is violent and painful, even as it creates – often in the same moments. In writing about sex in transgressive ways, the epigraphic characters and their authors tap into this violent, painful, creative power, exposing it as well.

But if creativity is related to sex, then for a Western writer it is also related to God in some very particular ways. The Judeo-Christian god creates asexually; most compellingly for writers, he creates through his *logos*. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1) speaks to the strange alchemy of writing a novel: A writer creates fiction that seems to live out of a set of abstract symbols; a story both does and does not exist. And asexual creation is more readily available to male writers than the model of birthing a book is. In God as Creator, writers can find a model that mirrors the relationship of the artificial to the actual that they intuit underlying the conventional novel. They can also find someone who creates a world and shapes everything in it to a particular end.

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David Lodge has defined three kinds of twentieth-century writing: modernist, antimodernist, and postmodernist. According to Lodge, antimodernist writing

> continues the tradition modernism reacted against. It believes that traditional realism, suitably modified to take account of changes in human knowledge and material circumstances, is still viable and valuable. . . . It regards literature as the communication of a reality that exists prior to and independent of the act of communication. . . . Antimodernist writing, then, gives priority to content, and is apt to be impatient with formal experiment, which obscures and hinders communication. (*After Bakhtin* 6-7)

In contrast, "Postmodernism continues the modernist critique of traditional realism, but it tries to go beyond or around or underneath modernism, which for all its formal

experiment and complexity held out to the reader the promise of meaning, if not of *a* meaning" (12). The two kinds of literature that follow modernism, then, can roughly be divided into that which prioritizes the story (antimodernism) and that which prioritizes the discourse or composition (postmodernism). Since the epigraphic novel relies on a dialogue between the story and the discourse, it would seem impossible for its development to continue after the death of modernism. But as Lodge says,

> Antimodernist writers invariably put up a poor show as theorists and aestheticians in the modern period: in order to distinguish themselves from the modernists they tend to be forced into naïve, fallacious or philistine attitudes to the creative process. . . . Antimodernist writing is invariably more interesting than the theory that supports it; of modernist writing, sometimes, the reverse is true. (*After Bakhtin* 7)

Antimodernist writing is interesting because it doesn't completely defenestrate theory. Antimodernists might sound untheoretical when articulating their attitudes towards fiction, but in practice, their novels are often very well crafted, though not ostentatiously innovative. Graham Greene systematically used multiple theological concepts and rhetorical devices to construct an entire dimension for the novel, without calling a lot of attention to the project. He tricked countless readers into wrestling with their unbelief, not through a story but through a narrative structure that they did not realize they were participating in. He outdid both the modernists and the postmodernists.

Postmodernism simultaneously promotes innovation and demotes plot. Postmodernism thus lends itself more easily to metafiction than to epigraphic fiction, which requires the elements of story and discourse to be in dialogue. Nonetheless, the

distinctions of modernism, postmodernism, and antimodernism are on a relative scale. While I do not consider Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* postmodern because the frame tale is largely realist, others critics might reasonably decide the novel is postmodern. But postmodern or not, *At Swim-Two-Birds* works because the epigraphic utterances are in dialogue with the epigraphic enactment – the narrator's theories are the basis, however rickety, of his story. Each novel treated in this dissertation has featured graphic or epigraphic enactment as part of the epigraphic dynamic – or even pitted the epigraphic utterances against the story itself. In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Flann O'Brien pits the narrator's epigraphic utterances against a rhetorical appeal to an implied reader who believes in commonsense understandings about how novels work – something David Lodge also does in *Nice Work*, when the narrator introduces Robyn Penrose:

> A character who, rather awkwardly for me, doesn't herself believe in the concept of character. That is to say (a favourite phrase of her own), Robyn Penrose, Temporary Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Rummidge, holds that "character" is a bourgeois myth, an illusion created to reinforce the ideology of capitalism. (21)

Satisfyingly, the novel ends with a bit of Robyn's literary theory becoming a controlling aesthetic theory for the ending – or with the ending vindicating the theories, depending on how you view it. An epigraphic dynamic could conceivably exist without a graphic or epigraphic enactment, but without a story, the dynamic would fall flat. The epigraphic character is at home in conventional fiction, and less likely to exist in postmodern settings.

Although the epigraphic character is inherently metafictional, it is also inherently fictional: it relies on the story and builds a dynamic by putting story, discourse, and rhetorical elements into dialogue. Postmodern works often flatten out; their stories fall through, or they evade meaning. They cannot support the epigraphic dynamic. They might have epigraphic characters, but unless their epigraphic utterances also speak to something else in the text, they are not epigraphic – they are dangling ideas about literature that perhaps speak to the nature of fiction as opposed to reality. The epigraphic novel speaks to the mystery of writerly creation, to fiction as opposed to ideas about fiction, to fiction as it embodies reality. The epigraphic novel uses metafictional means to talk about how stories work; metafiction uses stories to talk about how fiction works. Fiction and metafiction are a continuum. The epigraphic character is a metafictional element that exists as a central part of otherwise conventional fiction, just as metafiction depends on the conventional elements of a story.

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